



Let's think about **friendships:**

Notes for teachers

**The
Children's
Society**



This short leaflet is targeted at teachers, mentors or church workers who may be working through the Let's think about friendships resource with young people. It offers a few quick pointers as to how you may choose to share the booklets with young people.

Background to this resource

This resource has been developed by the Diocese of Sheffield and The Children's Society.

The Children's Society is a national children's charity that helps children and young people to enjoy safer, happier childhoods (you can find out more about our work at **childrenssociety.org.uk**)

For the last 15 years, as part of their annual **Good Childhood Report**, The Children's Society's has been listening to what young people have been saying about their well-being, and gathering their views on things that matter to them in their lives.

By listening to children in this way, The Children's Society has been able to understand more about what's important to them.

In recent years, The Children's Society has learnt more about the important role friendships play in children's well-being. To understand this better, during Spring 2020 they asked young people aged 8-19 from across the country in schools and youth clubs about friendships. What the young people said was really valuable and important, so The Children's Society created two friendship guides to support children's friendships, one aimed

at young people themselves and one for adults/parents/carers – these are available to download at childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/friendship-guide-for-young-people_0.pdf and childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/friendship-guide-for-adults_0.pdf

Adapted from the original young people's friendship guide, this guide is aimed at primary school aged children. It is aimed specifically at young people within Church of England primary schools – and therefore includes some Christian content (eg quotations from the Bible) – although it may of course be used outside that context.

About this guide and Sheffield diocese

Working with The Children's Society, The Diocese of Sheffield has helped produce this guide. We listened to what children said about friendship in some of our local primary schools, and what they told us was so helpful and important. In the booklet you will see some of the things that these young people said, though we haven't included their names with their words, so that no one can identify who we spoke to.

Using this booklet

The notes that follow give a guide as to how an adult working with a group of young people can guide them through these activities and the thoughts and questions that they raise.

Five important things before you start:

1. You may want to look at this resource and consider just how hands-on or hands-off you need to be. The booklet is designed so that children can work through it as they would a comic or activity book. It's up to the adults working through the exercises to decide the degree to which they will involve themselves in these activities.
2. Children's confidences and safety are paramount when working through this sort of material. To keep children safe, adults working with children on this resource will need to respect the degree to which children are happy to share thoughts and reflections, and the degree to which these are to remain confidential. From its work listening to young people, The Children's Society has learnt that framing questions and activities in the third person is safest to start with – children can then choose how personal to make things.
3. It's also important to reassure children and make them aware of what support is available in their school and beyond (e.g. from home, from other trusted adults or from a helpline such as Childline). **This is an important part of the process with all children to ensure they feel safe and secure. Some children may find some of the subject matter distressing or it may stir things up for them at the time or later. It is therefore important to keep re-visiting the conversation as young people work through the booklet.**
4. The materials are from a Church of England perspective and have a Christian background, but the main body of the activities and text should remain open and accessible to children from all perspectives and backgrounds. This should also guide the way anyone working with the booklet approaches the diversity of the groups we work with.
5. Age range: This booklet is aimed at primary-age young people, especially those in Key Stage 2.

'Our commitment to the dignity and ultimate worth of each person, rooted in each being created in the image of God and loved by God, is further shaped by the person, teaching and example of Jesus.'

Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good (London: Church of England 2016)



Friendship in Christian faith and education

Friendship is a word that springs from the heart of Christian thinking. From the core belief in the Trinity, there is a notion of a God who is relational and has created humanity to live in relationship, one with each other. The opening story of the Bible, the creation of humanity, quickly includes the notion that it is not good for us to live alone. The God who then calls the people of God is utterly relational and calls the people to live in a good and just community. In the New Testament, Jesus's ministry was marked by his friendships, including with those others thought unworthy and to be shunned, and the Church is formed to be a community flourishing together in fellowship.

From that Christian background, this resource homes in on and affirms friendship in a way that is in keeping with the Church of England's Vision for Education, which is committed to encouraging flourishing togetherness, noting that:

'The conviction that we are created and sustained by God for living together in families and communities is at the root of our dedication to educating for life together.'

The Church's SIAMS Inspection Framework envisages some of the ways we will do this by asking schools to reflect on:

'To what extent does your school's Christian vision and associated values underpin relationships at all levels in the school community, enabling pupils to disagree well and to practice forgiveness and reconciliation?'

Exploring the values that underpin good relationships, enabling healthy difficulty and disagreement, and providing thoughts that will support forgiveness and reconciliation – that's what **Let's think about friendships** is all about.

To be my friend I need to form a healthy relationship with you, as you, and vice versa.

In theological terms, the spiritual thinker Martin Buber wrote of the way humanity is created to be relational, and described the way in which this involved seeing other people as, to use an old and honorific word, 'thou' rather than as an 'it.' Buber uses that older, special term for 'you' and, in doing so, highlights the way in which being really present to somebody involves moving from an 'I-it' relationship to an 'I-Thou' one. An essential part of reconciliation involves enabling children to fully regard their friend as another person, with feelings and views of their own, sure in the belief described by Christian psychologist, David Benner that, 'Every "It" can become a "Thou."'¹

The Church of England's Vision for Education states:

Living before God and living with and for others go together in Jesus. He embodies the centrality of relationships in love, compassion, generosity, truth-telling, forgiveness, and gathering a community. The community of his followers is bound together in a covenant that commits us to love God and be good neighbours to all, in line with his Jewish scriptures that Jesus taught: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' and 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; see Matthew 7:12, 22:36-40; Luke 10:27). Jesus's Sermon on the Mount gives a vision of life as part of the family of a God who is fully inclusive in loving, 'making the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (Matthew 5:45). The centrality of relationships in education is inspired by our conviction that the love Jesus taught and lived is at the heart of reality.

Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good (London: Church of England 2016)

¹ David Benner, *Presence and Encounter: The Sacramental Possibilities of Everyday Life*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2014.

Notes to support particular activities

Page 6 – Reflection activity

This activity provides a creative and child-centred way of simply exploring the word 'friend'.

The activity provides scope for sharing, but just be mindful that some young people may choose to keep their reflections to themselves.

In a school setting, some of this material may lend itself to sharing as part of a whole school drive on exploring friendship, or as part of collective worship.

Young people could take turns to share some of their reflections from the experience of doing the picture on page 6.

Pages 7-9 – Why do we need to talk about friendships?

One of the main questions this resource explores is the degree to which friendships are worth thinking about, because they require a lot of thought and working on (you might want to make children aware that even adults have to work on friendships!).

In working through this activity, the adult working with children may want to keep a tally of the degree to which friendships are complicated. One way of doing this would be to consider and discuss – and maybe even figure out what is going on – when one of our honest young people said of friendships: 'I can't keep them myself'.

In Collective Worship, the question 'What is the most important thing in a friendship?' can generate a host of ideas that can be printed on lots of large sheets of A3 paper. The children who suggested them could stand around the edge of the room / assembly hall, holding up their suggestion, creating a circle of friendship words to think about.



Pages 11-13 – What makes a good friendship?

This is one where all adults can be drawn in. In a school setting, children could survey staff and members of the church and local community and amass a collection of responses to this sentence starter.

In the booklet, the quote from the Church of England Vision for Education states that:

‘Our commitment to the dignity and ultimate worth of each person, rooted in each being created in the image of God and loved by God, is further shaped by the person, teaching and example of Jesus.’

You may want to unpick this convoluted wording and explore with young people what they think is meant by humanity being ‘in the image of God’ and how Jesus sets an example.

The survey findings could be presented in an act of collective worship, and could possibly include interviewing those who contributed to say a bit more.



Pages 16-19 – Friendship virtues

The idea of qualities or virtues that make for good friendship can result in an exploration of the qualities we value in one another. If the school has a values statement this may relate to words contained in that vision.

One activity a staff team can undertake is to ask what a child of that school would turn out like, using the school name. So if the staff of St John's Primary ask:

'What would a St John's child be like?' it opens a space to think and aspire to the character and values they would seek in a child formed by the school. It's the sort of question that can interest young people and the parental community. It's also an interesting task for a school council.

In Collective Worship, the exploration of virtues displayed in stories of heroes of the faith or Biblical characters can lend themselves to this reflection.

Pages 20-21 – Communication

Is arguing a good thing? In exploring communication, this resource opens a question about the balance between the ideal friendship and the realism involved in learning to disagree well.

To make discussion work well here, adults working through this resource with young people may want to tactfully use appropriate disagreements from their child – or adult – life as examples.

Focus on the fact that lines of communication need to be kept open and healthy.

In Collective Worship and other opportunities for reflection, there is a good story to share in Mark's Gospel. The story involves Jesus and a scribe, a religious expert of the day (Mark 12.28-34). It is set right in the middle of the last week of Jesus's life, when the authorities who were against him were trying to catch him out with questions.

In it, Jesus discusses and forms a respectful relationship with one of the members of this council of authorities.

It makes for reflection on the things we disagree on, whether politics, football or which way to put your jam and cream on a scone!

Pages 22-24 – How do we get on with each other? and Friendship struggles

This activity around how we get on raises the tricky fact that, sometimes, we don't. People don't gel, people move on or differences occur. This section raises the whole area of the degree to which we accept the realities of relationships and the degree to which we influence them.

This section also raises the difficult issue of those who do not have any or many friends. This can be a real problem in this age group, and sensitivity will need to be applied in exploring this issue to ensure it is not perceived as patronising.

As a whole-school drive, young people and staff could explore the business of friendship and buddying and ask, 'How we can ensure a child isn't left lonely during those social times that pepper the day?'. In some schools loneliness is combatted by a playground

buddy initiative in which children who are looking for someone to play with can be supported by a playground buddy, who has applied and been interviewed for this role. Their role can also be to teach some games and get playground games going. Sometimes they are older than the children they support.

In Collective Worship, the story of how Jesus stopped to invite himself to the home of a tax collector with whom others would have disassociated themselves could provide a focus for reflection (Luke 19.1-10). Jesus identified the friendless person who the crowds had held back, noticing him even though he was up a tree. We don't want to imply friendless people are like the tax collectors of Biblical stories, but there is something special about the way Jesus notices people. Could we cultivate, in our school community, the habit of noticing each other and looking out for each other?

Pages 26-28 – When friendships go wrong

The section on friendships going wrong is particularly useful as a tool to turn to during conflicts and difficulties. It provides a highly basic step into conflict resolution, but can be the makings of a class or group of young people considering their response to tensions and difficulties.

The reflection on Matthew 7.3-4 is translated specially for this resource in a way that will hopefully get across some of the craziness of the scenario Jesus created in this image.

In Collective Worship, this section can be further explored through reflection on stories of reconciliation, such as that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 11.15-24) and the way this teaches the model of waiting for and being reconciled in a relationship that has been broken.

Pages 29-30 – Friendships in our lives

The friendship lines made in this activity may be worth sharing and can form the basis of young people recounting their own stories of friendship. As they do this, they may reflect on some of the key features drawn out in this resource around what makes for a good friendship, what qualities or virtues we value in friends and how we approach the thorny business of friendships going wrong. Within the bounds of children-safe confidentiality, these lines can make for an interesting display.

In Collective Worship, staff could share their own stories of friendship, and school volunteers and visitors could also be asked to think of the stories that demonstrate a good friendship working over time. Young people tend to love hearing such stories from adults and these can role model the way friendships can work.

Take it home

The prompts below are for booklet readers to chat about with their families and people they live with – the people at home.

Page 6 – Reflection activity

Ask the people at home to tell you about friendships they had at your age.

Pages 7-9 – Why do we need to talk about friendships?

Ask the people at home whether they know what makes their friendships work well.

Pages 11-13 – What makes a good friendship?

How would people at home end the sentence: 'Friendships work when...'

Pages 16-19 – Friendship virtues

Talk to people at home about the whole business of being good and doing the right thing. How do we know what the right way to treat one another is?

Pages 20-21 – Communication

Can anyone at home give examples of when good conversations and support have been really important in their lives?

Pages 22-24 – How do we get on with each other? and Friendship struggles

What advice would people at home give about making and keeping friendships?

Pages 26-28 – When friendships go wrong

Talk about forgiveness, and what it means to the people at home.

Pages 29-30 – Friendships in our lives

Make a list of what people at home most enjoy doing with friends.



Some good books for thinking further about friendships

Friendship is a theme of many books written for children, but the ones below are selected as popular reads that develop thinking about friends and relationships.

Picture books

- *Leon and Bob*, Simon James (Walker)
- *Something Else*, Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell (Puffin)

Children's novels

- *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (series), Jeff Kinney (Puffin)
- *Bad Girls*, Jacqueline Wilson (Yearling)
- *Best Friends*, Jacqueline Wilson (Yearling)

The Children's Society fights for the hope and happiness of young people when it is threatened by abuse, exploitation and neglect. We take inspiration from the courage and hope we see in young people every day. It fuels our belief that a good childhood is something every young person deserves.

We fight for hope by understanding the needs of young people and supporting them through their challenges. We also campaign tirelessly for the big social changes that will transform the well-being of young people, and strive to improve the lives of those who need hope most.

Driven by hope and working alongside young people and supporters, we will not rest until together we've created a society built for all children.