

“Friends” Versus “Friendly”

Prepared by Autism Victoria, March 2008, Reviewed, April 2011

This is a condensed version of an article by Donna Williams, which illustrates the complexity of that seemingly simple word ‘friend’. The full text of the article can be found at: www.donnawilliams.net Donna Williams has published nine books about Autism Spectrum Disorder and has a mailing list to which she posts frequent and informative commentary.

When does a friendly person become a friend?

How do you determine when a friendly person becomes your friend? There is a ‘friendly spectrum’ ranging from polite to likeable to wanting to help you to wanting something from you. How do you tell where on the ‘friendly spectrum’ another person is?

It is very easy to think that anyone friendly is a friend, but that is not usually the case. Being friendly can be the same as being polite. Being friendly can also mean ‘I find you likeable’.

Likeable doesn't yet mean the friendly person has enough experience of you to like you. Likeable is an impression and this can be formed quickly. To like is something one gets with some experience and for most people that happens more slowly, usually over weeks or even months.

Now it gets harder. Even if people find you likeable and like you ... they may still not be a friend!



When a person likes you but is not yet a friend they are called an acquaintance. To acquaint means to get to know. An acquaintance is a person you have got to know. An acquaintance is not a friend.

An acquaintance may not feel 'attachment' to you or 'loyalty' to you like a friend might. Some acquaintances don't want to be friends even if they like you! This may be because

- They have a life that's too busy
- You like them because of their job more than who they are as a person
- Because you are more interested in your own needs and they aren't getting as much out of the connection as you are

- They need a different kind of connection to the one you can offer (they might prefer quieter or more talkative people or people who need less contact or more contact than you or they might just not like having friends!).

But some acquaintances may later become friends!



Having a friend should feel good

Having a friend should feel like a good thing. It might have some difficult times but mostly it should feel better to have that friend than not have them as a friend.

Friendships can change over time. Some friends are happy to see each other occasionally; other friends do things together all the time. Some friends only communicate by phone, letter or email. Sometimes friends lose contact with each other, or decide that they prefer to no longer be friends, just acquaintances.

You do not 'pay' for friendship. Some people will try to make friends with you for wrong reasons. Wrong reasons are reasons that make you feel bad about yourself. Other people will like you and make friends with you for the right reasons. Right reasons are reasons that feel ok when you are together.

Friendship

Friendship means behaving like a friend. But sometimes if you have no friends but need

friendship a carer or therapist may behave as if you have a friendship. But these professional people are being paid to behave this way. They may like you. They may even say they are your friend. They have a working friendship with you. When they are not working they have their own friends. So these people are not personal friends. For some people, these are good friends to have, especially if they don't have any personal friends.

What makes a good friend?

Some people are not ready for a personal friend because they haven't learned to be friends with themselves. If you want friends, it is good practice to start by being kind to yourself, finding ways to cheer yourself up, calm yourself down and reasons to like yourself. When other people see that you are happy and that you like yourself they will be more likely to want to be friends with you.

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