

## Chapter 20

# Having a Friend and Being a Friend

After talking to our students for a long time on the issue of friends we discovered some interesting facts. All of you had friends—some good and some not so good. For some of you, your best friend was a brother or a sister.

When we asked about your friends you told us that you didn't really have any friends out-

side of your family. But sometimes the best friends in the world are the ones living right under the same roof with you. A few of you had best friends, people you had been friends with for a long time. Some of you had groups of friends. And some of you were disappointed in your friends because you felt they had let you down. Lots of you were still looking for friends and felt a bit lonely sometimes.

As you grow older, you probably find that you spend more and more time with your friends. Knowing who to be friends with and who not to be friends with can be a tricky choice. Knowing how to be a friend can be tricky, too. It is good to have friends, and to learn to be a friend to someone else.



## What Do You Think Makes a Friend?

When we asked a group of teens what a friend was, this is what they said: *a friend is someone you can count on; a friend is a person you can trust with your secrets; a friend thinks like you and likes to hang out with you; my best friend is cool because he always sticks up for me; and a friend is someone who cares about you and how you feel.*

Copy the following list down in your notebook. Put a mark next to the items you agree with. We think that you will not agree on all of the items, and some of you may argue over what makes a true friend. Remember, this is not a test, just a little exercise to see where you stand on the subject of friendship.

A friend is someone who:

- ☉ *is always nice to me*
- ☉ *likes my other friends*
- ☉ *my other friends like*
- ☉ *is fun to be with*
- ☉ *treats me like a sister or a brother*
- ☉ *tells me all her secrets*
- ☉ *agrees with me all the time*
- ☉ *will tell me plainly when he thinks I am acting badly*
- ☉ *I can share my things with*
- ☉ *shares his things with me*
- ☉ *will stick up for me when I am not around to stick up for myself*

Which items do you think are true? What makes a friend? Do you want friends who are different than you are, or friends who are like you—or a combination of both? What is friendship all about?

## What Are the Qualities of a Friend?

Your answers to the list above may help you sort out what is important to you in a friend. All friendships are different, but good relationships have a common thread. What are some of the ingredients of a good friend?

Do you agree that a friend is someone:

- ☉ *You can talk to honestly without being afraid he will laugh at you or think you are stupid.*

- ☉ *Respects you but is not afraid to tell you if she thinks you are wrong.*
- ☉ *Is polite to your family.*
- ☉ *May have some common interests, or may be someone you just enjoy spending time with even though you do not have many common interests.*
- ☉ *You feel good about being with (a person who doesn't put you down or make you feel small).*
- ☉ *Keeps promises.*
- ☉ *Who trusts you (if you have proven yourself to be trustworthy!).*
- ☉ *Who is loyal to you (won't talk behind your back).*
- ☉ *Who understands you have other friends and interests and doesn't expect you to spend every minute of the day with him or her.*

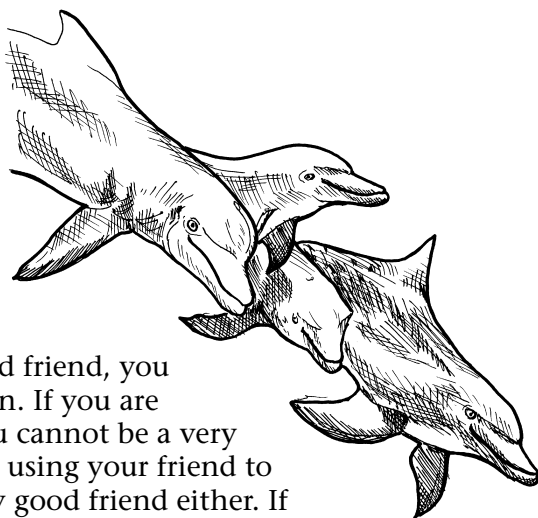
Have we forgotten anything? What qualities in a friend are important to you? We have listed the ideal, and it is important to keep in mind that no one is perfect. Actually, being able to accept someone as he is, and being able to forgive and apologize, are also important parts of friendship.

So far we have just talked about what to look for in a friend, but did we mention that in order to have a friend you have to be a friend?

## **To Have a Friend, Be a Friend**

Most people would like to have a best friend, someone to whom they are the most important. But how many people think about making themselves someone else's best friend?

When you are someone's good friend, you care about and respect that person. If you are only looking out for yourself, you cannot be a very caring friend. Likewise, if you are using your friend to get something, you are not a very good friend either. If you are a friend to that person on good days and bad days, if you are willing to forgive sometimes, and if you are reliable,



then you are a good friend.

Why does it seem that some of the people who appear to be the best of friends start to fight or break their friendship altogether? Being a real friend takes work. In the beginning it's exciting to find a new friend—someone you can laugh and have fun with, someone you can talk to about anything. But after a while you are sure to have differences of opinion or to get into arguments. That's okay. Even the best of friends have fights sometimes. You may not like some of the things you see in your friend. What will you do when you and your friend don't get along for the first time, or when your friend does something that hurts your feelings? What if he begins to irritate you? What will happen when something goes wrong? How you handle your differences, and how you treat each other will determine what kind of a friendship you have.

*My best friend started to talk behind my back in school. She told someone else that I was stuck up. It made me so mad, I broke off our friendship. Later she wrote me a note and told me she was sorry. She said she was wrong and that she wouldn't talk badly about me again. I really missed her, so I decided to give her another chance.*

Laura, 13

## Friendship: What Can You Do to Try to Overcome Difficulties?

- ☺ If you have hurt your friend, you can apologize and try to do something to make up for what you did.
- ☺ If your friend has hurt you, tell her honestly how you feel and also try to understand how she feels (most stories have two sides). You can forgive her for the hurt she caused you.
- ☺ You can listen to your friend and try to understand how he feels. Maybe he is upset with something that happened to him at home or in one of his classes. Perhaps your friend is acting mean towards you because someone else hurt his feelings.

*One of our friends, Ron, started to act really stupid. He started acting like the class clown and making fun of everyone. He even picked fights with everyone and just acted like a jerk. We cut him out. We stopped calling him and sitting with him at lunch. A few weeks ago I found out his mom has some really bad kind of cancer. I think I may act like a jerk too if that happened to me and I thought my mom would die. We all decided to let him hang out with us again.*

John, 12

Have you ever heard the expression *A friend in need is a friend indeed*? No one can be happy and healthy all the time, so it is good to think ahead and realize that a good friend is a person who will not run away the minute things become rough. A good friend can support his friend by listening to him and supporting him. When someone is feeling down, he needs his friend's kindness and care, and this is a very important part of being a friend, although it may not be so interesting or fun. A true friend is always willing to give up a little of his fun when necessary, and usually this is just the thing someone needs to get going again.

Before you judge your friend, try to find out what is *really* going on. When your friends misbehave or act moodily, how do you respond? Do you assume your friend is mad at you, or being a bad friend? It may be the case, but it may not be. Your friend may be upset about something that is happening at home, and it may be hard to talk about. The best way to find out is to open your ears and mind.

## Why the Golden Nugget?

Why do we say that friendship is a golden nugget? The truth is that a good friend is very hard to find. To be a good friend you have to be a person with character—someone who is honest, compassionate, and respectful. Not all people have taken the opportunity to become their own friend, and don't know how to be a friend to others. If you don't like yourself, it can be hard to like others.

And, as you grow up and your ideas and interests change, your friends may change as well. Therefore, a true friend is a golden nugget—a rare and valuable find. Hold onto a true friend by being a friend yourself, and realize that you have something special.



*My best friend is great. We see each other almost every day and play soccer after school. We play basketball too. He makes things more interesting.*

*Harry, 12*



## Journal

What do you think about the expression, *To Have a Friend, Be a Friend*? What do you think makes a good friend? Can you have many friends at the same time or is it better to have only one good friend?



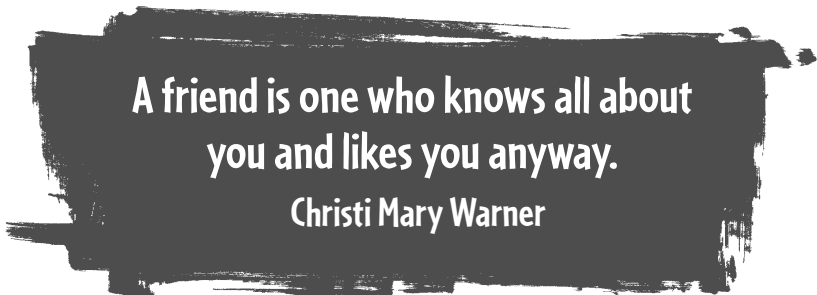
## To Do

1. Take a poll in your class and find out what the majority of the class thinks are the most important qualities of a friend. Which qualities are absolutely necessary, and which are not? Are there certain things you and your friend can disagree on and still be close friends?
2. Is it an obstacle for friendship when people are different? Perhaps it is most important to understand each other, while remaining different. Draw a map that shows some of the obstacles that friends must go through to become true friends (for example: different opinions, having other friends, wanting to do different things, having an argument, etc.). These can either be obstacles that you already experienced or just ones you know that other people have experienced. Do you think a friendship will be stronger after the friends have gone over a few obstacles? Why or why not?
3. In small groups, make a collage from newspapers, magazines and drawing materials that shows some of the expressions of friendship. What does friendship look like? Your collage should show the joy and sorrows that friends share together.



## Key Ideas

- ☉ Everyone wants friends.
- ☉ To have a friend, be a friend.
- ☉ A good friend is loyal and won't talk behind your back.



**A friend is one who knows all about  
you and likes you anyway.**

**Christi Mary Warner**

