

FIVE STAGES OF FRIENDSHIP

0

Momentary Physical Interaction

A friend is someone whom you are playing with at this point in time
Ages 3–6

- Children are egocentric and have a limited ability to see other perspectives.
- Likely to say “She’s not my friend” if the peer wants to do something different.
- Friends are those who are close in proximity and accessible (my neighbor, on my bus, sit at my table group).
- Friendship is about doing the same thing and having fun.

1

One-Way Assistance

A friend is someone who does nice things for you
Ages 5–9

- Viewed through a concrete and pragmatic lens.
- Having a friend is very important—so important that children at this stage will put up with mistreatment or not so nice friends just to have a friend.
- Bargaining is used to make and keep friends.
 - “I’ll be your friend if you ...”
 - “I won’t be your friend if you don’t ...”

2

Fair-Weather Cooperation

A friend is someone who returns a favor
Ages 7–12

- Fairness and reciprocity are very important, and friendships may end over a lack of it.
- There is an expectation that something nice will be done in return.
- Small friend groups tend to form based on interests, sometimes forming “secret clubs.”
- Can be judgmental of themselves and others.
- Worry about fitting in and wanting to be like everyone else.

3

Intimate and Mutual Sharing

A friend is someone you can tell things you wouldn’t tell anyone else
Ages 8–15

- No longer about “keeping score.”
- Do nice things because they genuinely care for the friend.
- Want friends to share similar interests and viewpoints, and may take it as a betrayal if a friend sees things differently.
- Mutual trust is important, and if friendships end, it may be because of a violation of trust.
- Girls, more so than boys, take on best friends and expect to do everything together and may be easily hurt if one chooses to do something with someone else.

4

Autonomous Interdependence

A friend is someone who accepts you and that you accept as they are
Ages 12+

- Able to accept and appreciate differences between themselves and their friends.
- Not as possessive and more willing and able to share friends if they have other relationships or interests.
- A high value is placed on emotional closeness with friends.
- Emphasizes trust and support, remaining close over time and even separations.