

# How friends are helpful

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

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- understand positive and negative peer influence and how it can affect the choices people make
- carry out an act of kindness towards another person
- identify the qualities of supportive friends
- learn how peer influence and friendships relate to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling

## TIME

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- 45-minute lesson

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

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flip chart paper

*Friendship Wheel*

*What Is a Good Friend?* handout

two pieces of heavier paper (e.g., poster or construction paper)

two paper fasteners (to attach the arrows onto the friendship wheels)



Friendships and peer influence, both positive and negative, play an important role in the choices people make as they are faced with difficult decisions. This lesson highlights the importance of having friends with positive qualities and supportive friendships to influence young people in healthy ways and, as a result, prevent problems with alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling.

## Opening activity: Peer influence (10 minutes)

Have a discussion with the class about peer influence. Ask the students if they know what it is and if they can think of a statement to define it. Once they have agreed on a definition, ask them to give examples of negative and positive peer influence that are both obvious and subtle. For example, sometimes one friend will tease another or make obvious statements to sway the decision the other friend will make. Sometimes more manipulative strategies are used, such as excluding or ignoring a person. Also note that peer influence can happen over time: a person may change simply by being exposed to different behaviours. Encourage the students to discuss a range of examples. Record their ideas on flip chart paper.

**Definition**—peer influence is the effect that people of the same age range have on each other.

Examples of negative peer influence are

- doing something you know is wrong just because your friends are doing it
- “Come on, everyone’s doing it.”
- joining in when classmates are picking on someone
- swearing around your friends
- comments like “Trying one cigarette won’t hurt you”  
Or “You’re a chicken if you don’t”
- laughing at a hurtful joke about your friend who isn’t there
- teasing your friend for not doing something
- taking a bite of a chocolate bar your friend stole
- drinking beer because your friends encourage you

Examples of positive peer influence are

- “I saw you kick that soccer ball and you’re really good! You should join our team.”
- forming a study group with friends to improve in math
- sharing your lunch with your friend
- asking someone who doesn’t usually play with you or your friends to join in at recess
- “No thanks, I don’t smoke.”
- someone encouraging you to join the choir because you sing so well
- talking to new kids who join your group and welcoming them
- “Don’t worry, it’s okay. We all make mistakes.”
- your friend explaining why she is mad instead of not talking to you
- “I’m sorry you have a headache, but you need to get some medicine from a doctor or your mom, not from me.”

Ask the class to make a conclusion about how positive and negative peer influence can affect people’s behaviour.

## Acts of kindness

(10 minutes)

Photocopy the Friendship Wheel on two pieces of heavier paper, such as construction paper. Cut out each wheel and arrow and attach one arrow to the center of each wheel using the paper fasteners.

Divide the class into two groups and have each group sit in a circle, with a friendship wheel in the centre. Read the acts of kindness listed on the wheel and ask students to think of words to describe these acts (friendly, supportive, caring, etc.). Have volunteers describe other acts of kindness their friends have done that make them feel special. Choose one idea and print it on the blank space of each wheel. Explain to students that their task is to complete one act of kindness on the friendship wheel by the end of the school day.

Everyone in the circle takes a turn spinning the arrow on the friendship wheel. Whatever the arrow lands on is that student's act of kindness to complete. Have students read their act of kindness out loud after spinning and others in the group can make suggestions about how to go about completing the act of kindness (e.g., you can offer help by looking in the lost and found with someone; you can invite someone to play with you and your friends in the park at lunch; you can go up to a Grade 1 student and get to know him by introducing yourself at recess, etc.).

Ask the class to think about how doing acts of kindness relates to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. Give them an opportunity to express their thoughts, and then explain the following points:

- A person who acts kindly towards others is likely to have positive self-esteem, good social skills and many friends.
- A person who has positive self-esteem, good social skills and many friends is at a lower risk of having problems with alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling.

Have students write down their act of kindness in their agenda as a reminder to complete it sometime during the day.

## What is a supportive friend?

(15 minutes)

Have students brainstorm a list of positive qualities they would want in a friend. Write their answers on flip chart paper. You might want to give the class a sentence to get started; you can then come up with concluding statements together. Here is an example:

It is important to have friends who are

- trustworthy
- honest
- thoughtful
- kind
- fair
- grateful
- humourous
- responsible
- caring
- helpful

These are the kinds of friends that I can have fun with, trust, and rely on when I need help. Being around these friends helps me to be a good friend too.

Give students a copy of the handout *What Is a Good Friend?* Ask them to write down the qualities they would want in a friend. Once they finish, have them think about which qualities they have, and which ones they would like to develop, to be a good friend themselves. They can colour and cut out their work to display in the classroom.

## Closure: The importance of friendships and peer influence

(5 minutes)

Ask students to discuss first, why peer influence and friendships are so important; and second, how these topics relate to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. Clarify that the positive peer influence that comes from the supportive friendships that young people form with others can

- influence them to make healthy decisions
- enable them to feel support rather than pressure
- help them get through difficult situations
- give them someone trustworthy to talk to

# Friendship wheel





What is a good friend?

