



Building Friendships - a skill for life

Children's friendships are templates for the subsequent relationships they will form throughout school and the rest of their adult lives. Friends are vital to school age children's healthy development. Research has found that children who lack friends can suffer from emotional and mental difficulties later in life. Friendships provide children with more than just fun playmates; they help children develop emotionally and morally. In interacting with friends, children learn many social skills, such as how to communicate, cooperate and solve problems.

Having friends even affects children's school performance. Children tend to have better attitudes about school and learning when they have friends. When children are asked about the things that are important in their experience of education one factor appears to be important above all others – friendship.

A school in the diocese asked one of our social workers to run a group for year 6 pupils who were struggling to manage their friendships appropriately. The main aim of the group was to 'support and encourage appropriate friendships'.

Six sessions were delivered in which the girls worked together on;

- Building awareness of how others experienced them as individuals
- Articulating their feelings about friendships
- Managing appropriate friendships
- Choosing new friends and staying friends
- Exploring ways to communicate and resolving arguments
- What has been learnt and what would you do differently.



The girls completed 'homework', which gave them an opportunity to practise some of the skills they had learnt in the previous session. At the end of the programme the children were able to evaluate the impact of the group on their ability to sustain friendships. Some of the comments below illustrate how the children experienced the group and what they might do differently in the future.

Children tend to have better attitudes about school and learning when they have friends.

'I've EXPERIENCED having not so many problems'

'I felt really comfortable, and I liked that we learnt a lot about friendship'

'I liked it when we talked about solving problems that we had'

'I learnt to be good and don't lose your temper and don't be bad, just be calm, as people say to me calm your self!'

Some of the children continued with individual sessions as their problems were more complex but the school reported better relationships in the class overall and considered that the children were more prepared for the transition to secondary school.

Your support helps us to undertake these small but significant pieces of work in helping our children adjust to the wider society and grow into caring responsible adults.