

But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids

Why do we have friends?

July 29, 2022

Jane 00:20

This is But Why: a Podcast for Curious Kids from Vermont Public. I'm Jane Lindholm. On this show, we take questions from kids just like you and we find answers. If you have a question, we'll tell you how to send it to us at the end of the episode. Today we're talking about some of the most important people in our lives: friends.

Lawson 00:41

My name is Lawson and I am seven years old. I live in Broomfield, Colorado, and what I like about my friends is that they like me.

Layla 00:53

I'm Layla. I'm 10 years old. And I'm from Kirkwood, Missouri. What I like about friends is that if I get hurt, like if I scraped my knee, they're always there to support me and help me through it. My friends cheer me on always, and they'll always be there for you.

Sophia 01:11

Hi, my name is Sophia, and I live in Iowa City. I'm five years old.

Parent 01:19

What do you like about your friends?

Sophia 01:22

I like that they like unicorns just like me.

Jane 01:26

Some people find it easy to make friends. But for others, it's really challenging. And that's okay. And let me let you in on a little secret. It's just as hard for adults as it is for kids. But lots of you may be wondering if there are any tips or tricks to making friends. I'm sorry to say there's no magic solution. But there are some strategies you can use. And we're going to learn some of them from an adult who goes by the name of Dr. Friendtastic. Even more excitingly, we're gonna get some advice from other kids. Lots of you sent us your best approaches to making and being good friends. Here are some of the questions you've sent us about friends and friendship.

Sarah 02:08

Hello, my name is Sarah. I live in California. My question for But Why is why do people have friends?

Mark 02:17

My name is Mark. I am six years old. And I'm from Columbus, Ohio. Why do friends care about each other?

Veronica 02:35

Hi, my name is Veronica. I'm from Ottawa, Ontario. I'm seven years old. Why do we make friends?

Liam 02:43

My name is Liam. I'm eight years old. I'm from Sacramento, California. Why do we feel such a close bond with our friends?

Emma 02:55

Hello, my name is Emma. I'm eight years old. I live in Scarborough, Maine. How do you bonds between friends form?

Gabriella 03:03

Hi, my name is Gabriella. I'm from Israel. And I'm nine years old. And my question is what makes friends and wanting to be friends with somebody so attractive?

Eileen 03:16

So I'm Dr. Eileen Kennedy-Moore, also known as Dr. Fantastic. I'm a clinical psychologist based in Princeton, New Jersey, and author of many books about kids' feelings and friendships. Friendship is often about action. It's about what we do together how we treat each other. The key to friendship is kindness. And that's what leads to the sense of connection.

Dylan 03:40

Hi, my name is Dylan and I, and I'm seven years old and I live in Texas. How do people become really good friends?

Noah 03:49

Hi, my name is Noah. I am from Chicago, Illinois. And I'm seven years old. When people have friends why are they so attached to each other?

Lucas 03:59

My name is Lucas, I am seven years old. I live in Saco, Maine. Why is it more fun to play with friends than to play by yourself?

Eileen 04:09

Friends make the good times more fun. And they make the hard times easier to get through. So of course we want them that friends are very, very valuable. And you'd hit on something very interesting that yes, we are attracted to some people more than others. And that has a lot to do with how much we have in common with them, and how we feel when we're with them. So if you want to be a good friend, you need to be thinking about not just what you want, but what your friend wants too.

Jane 04:42

Maggie who's 12 and lives in Washington wants to know what's the deal with best friends? Why would some people consider some of their friends best friends if they liked them equally? A few more of you also wanted to talk about best friend.

Josephine 04:57

Hi, my name is Josephine. I live in Alabama, and I'm nine years old. Why do we have best friends? And like, why do we like some people and not others?

Emi 05:12

My name is Emi. And I'm 10 years old. And I'm from Japan. Can you have more than one best friend?

Akira 05:20

My name is Akira. I'm six years old. And I'm from Japan. Can my sister be my best friend?

Brooklyn 05:30

Hello. I'm Brooklyn. I'm eight years old. And I live in Oakland, California. And my question is, why do you always have best friends, and second best friends?

Eileen 05:43

I think it's more useful to talk about close friends rather than best friends. Because best is like you're putting somebody in a contest of who's better than the other one. And I think we have the the ability to care about many people, we can also have lots of different kinds of friends. So we can have a bus stop friend, and a math class friend and a taekwondo friend. And each of these people enrich our lives, and we can connect with them and be kind to them too.

Jane 06:17

So Dr. friendtastic, kind of agrees with Maggie, the label best friends can be kind of limiting. You can have different friends for different situations, and none has to be better than the other. And yes, Akira, you can totally be great friends with your sister. But what about the number of friends you have? Here's Mia.

Mia 06:38

I'm 7 years old. And I'm from China. My question is, why do some people have many friends but others don't?

Eileen 06:49

I think the first question that we need to ask before that is to recognize that more friends aren't necessarily better. Some people prefer to have just a few very close friends, other people like lots and lots of casual friends. Both of these can be great. So it's really a matter of personal preference.

Jane 07:10

So it's okay to just have one or two friends, you're not doing anything wrong.

Eileen 07:13

There's nothing wrong with that at all. It's really a matter of your personal preference. If we have fewer closer friends, that's often a more intimate a kind of a closer friendship than the just the people 'hey,' seeing in the hallway, kind of friendship, but they're both fun. So I'm in favor of all of it. The people who tend to have more friends are often putting more effort in to making friends and reaching out to friends, and spending time and doing fun things with friends.

Jane 07:49

Boy, well, that gets us to a question I think we all have, no matter how old you are. And maybe this is something kids don't realize, but adults worry about friendships all the time. We worry, are we in the right friendships? Is our friend still our friend? Do they still like us? And so how do we make friends?

Claire 08:09

Hi, my name is Claire. I'm nine years old. And I live in Oklahoma. And my question is, how do people keep friends?

Ethan 08:20

Hello, my name is Ethan. I'm eight. My question is how do you make friends?

Lilah 08:30

Why are people usually friendly. And how people know what to say when they're trying to make a friend?

Jane 08:41

That last question was from six-year-old Lilah.

Eileen 08:43

There are several steps in that. The first thing is that we need to show openness to friendship. So we need to signal that, hey, I'm open to getting to know you and to maybe starting a friendship with you. We do this by smiling and saying hi, we do it by giving a compliment or doing a small act of kindness for someone. There are thousands of ways that we can signal that, hey, I'm interested in a friendship. Another thing that's important is to pick people who are likely to become friends with us. If you think about two overlapping circles, that overlap where one circle is you and the other circle is the other kid, that overlap in the center. That's your common ground. That's where friendships begin. If you've really don't have much in common with another kid, you're probably not going to become friends with them. Another thing to keep in mind is that kids make friends by doing fun things together. So think about what you like to do that you could do with other people and go do it. Invite them. A lot of times kids are very scared of inviting somebody because they're like, oh, "I don't know him that well. I can't have them over." That's backwards, invite them over, and then you will become closer. You don't have to wait until you're close and then invite them over. If you've had fun with the kid one time, great, you know well enough to get together and maybe build the friendship.

Jane 10:15

We put a call out to you to share how you make friends. And here's what you all told us. We'll start with Hugo, who's six and lives in Australia.

Hugo 10:23

I think when you're being a good friend you have to be kind and nice.

Alex 10:30

My name is Alex. And I'm eight and I'm from Texas. You make a friend by saying, hello, what's your name? You say your name, and then you say do you want to play with me and they're gonna play with you. And if they're mean or a bully, then just ignore them.

Marnie 10:53

My name is Marnie. I'm five years old. And I live in Austin, Texas. This is how you make friends. We try to find somebody that we want to make friends. We say "hello, can I be your friend?"

Connor 11:09

My name is Connor. I'm seven years old. I live in London, Ontario, Canada. My advice about friendship is to choose someone who likes to do the same thing as as you do.

Leilah 11:26

Hi, my name is Leilah. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia. And I'm nine years old. This is how I make friends. First I say hi. And then I say my name then I ask them their name. Then I asked them to play. And then if they say yes, we started to play. After a while I start to talk to them. And then we and then we just have fun. And that's how I make a friend.

Elena 12:01

Hello, my name is Elena. I'm five years old, and I'm from China. I make friends asking people directly: "Can I be your friend?"

Eliza 12:17

My name is Eliza and I'm six years old. I'm from Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and friend should be your friends because they aren't mean too you. And if someone's makes you walk away or ignore them.

Allison 12:29

My name is Allison. I'm four years old. And I live in New Jersey. I make a friend at the pool and I say "Hi, what's your name? Wanna play?"

Parent 12:45

How do you make friends?

Haviv 12:47

First you're just a baby, then you grow up and then you be with somebody else and you play with them for a few minutes. And then they say we're friends.

Parent 13:01

Okay, so you play. That's how you make friends?

Haviv 13:03

Yeah.

Parent 13:04

Good. What's your name?

Haviv 13:05

Haviv.

Parent 13:06

You live in in Israel. And how old are you?

Haviv 13:09

Five.

Lillian 13:10

Hi, my name is Lillian. And I'm 6 years old. And I live in Springfield, Missouri. And this is how you make friends. You say hi. And then you talk. Then you introduce yourself. And then you can ask if you can be friends. That's how you make friends.

Lily 13:33

Hi, my name is Lily. I'm nine years old. I live in London, Ontario, Canada. And I would like to share about making friends. Just pick a friend you think is nice. Ask them. Don't overthink it, because they might want a friend too.

Norah 13:48

Hi, my name is Norah and I'm five years old. I live in Washington State. You do something nice for someone in your class or like someone or your neighbor or something. And then the ask you if you want to be friends with them. And this they say yeah, if you say yes, you will become friends.

Abby 14:09

Hi, I'm Abby. I am eight and I live in Stillwater, Minnesota. And I think you should pick somebody nice as a friend or it wouldn't be that much fun.

Jane 14:30

Listening to all those a lot of you said you start by introducing yourself. That's a great way to show an openness to friendship. Many others of you suggested just directly asking to be friends. For older kids, you might consider asking the other person to do something with you. Like go play on the swings or something you think you'd both enjoy as sort of a start of a way to ease into friendship. You know, there's also a difference if you're asking one kid to play with you, or a group of kids to play with you,

and Dr. Friendtastic has some strategies to think about, when there's a group of kids that you're trying to get to know.

Eileen 15:12

We are more likely to be successful joining a single kid, or a group of four or more on the playground. Isn't that interesting? Yeah. So it's not that you can't join a group of two or three. But often those are more close knit and less open to somebody joining them. If you don't know them, well, a single kid is they want to play with somebody there, they're definitely open. And a group of four or more Well, it's kind of big, and there's plenty of room to join. Another thing that's really important for kids to know, is that there's a very specific set of steps for how to join a group of kids at play. I really liked the way you said, Hey, do you want to play with me? Because now you're inviting the person. A lot of times grownups tell kids, go over to those kids and ask, Can I play too? Bad idea, because think about what happens, the other kids have to stop what they're doing. Turn around, look at you decide if they want you to join, and you've just interrupted the play. So from a kid's perspective, that's kind of rude. What researchers tell us is, the way to join a group is two steps: you watch, then blend. So watch what the kids are doing. And then slide into the action without interrupting. The way I explain this to kids is kind of like merging onto a highway.

Jane 16:42

Which they haven't done yet, but they've probably been in the backseat for.

Eileen 16:45

You've probably seen your parents do it, right? And there are two ways to mess this up. One is your parents could just sit there on the entrance ramp watching the cars go by and you never get where you want to go. The other way is, and your parents would never do this, they could just barge in without even looking at if there would be a big crash. So that's not a good idea, either. Just like your parents, or your grown ups, watch, then blend when they get onto the highway, you want to do the same thing. So figure out what the kids are doing. And then you might do the same thing near them. You might, like if they're building something, you might do something helpful, like bring over extra sticks, you might open with a compliment. Or if they're playing a game, watch and figure out which is the losing team because they're more likely to be open to having you join.

Jane 17:34

What do you do if you're shy, if that feels so hard, just to even go talk to somebody, let alone suddenly be in their play?

Eileen 17:44

Sometimes it helps to just watch other kids doing this. And then you can realize, huh, that is what happens. People who are shy tend to focus on how uncomfortable they feel. But what they don't realize is the message they're sending to other people is "I don't like you, and I don't want anything to do with you." Think about if somebody says "Hi," and you like look away and don't say anything, the other person is going to say, "Oh, I guess they don't like me." That's not what you're feeling. But that's what you're communicating. Learning how to say hi, is a really important skill. And there are several steps with that. So you look the person in the eye. Or if that's uncomfortable for you, you can look them in the

forehead right between the eyebrows, from a little bit of a distance that looks the same. Then you smile to show that you're happy to see the person, you say hi. And you say the person's name because that makes the greeting personal. I'm not just hi, whoever you are, I don't care. It's like no, hi, it's nice to see you.

Jane 18:48

There are times whether you're a kid or an adult, where you are going to put yourself out there and try to make a friend and the other person isn't going to want to be your friend. Maybe they just don't want to right now or like you said maybe they're busy and they they just can't focus. And that can feel really bad. But that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you, right? Just because someone doesn't want to be your friend.

Eileen 19:10

That happens sometimes. And that's okay. They have choices, and you have many, many options. One thing that I see a lot in my practice is kids have what I call the magnet myth of friendship. So they think that they have to be so amazing and wonderful that they draw friends to them the way a magnet attracts metal. This is completely false. Because it really doesn't understand what friendship is like. The magnet myth is looking for fans. If you're looking for "wow, you're amazing!" You are not looking for friends, you are looking for fans. And the problem is your classmates don't really want to be your fan, but they might want to be your friend. And the friendship is really about a relationship between equals figure out what you have in common and build from there.

Cavin 20:04

Hi, my name is Cavin. I am seven years old from Portland, Oregon. Why don't some people agree to be friends?

Molly 20:15

My name is Molly. I'm from Israel. I'm six years old. What if you want to be friends with somebody, but they don't want to be friends with you?

Maya 20:25

Hi, my name is Maya and I live in London, England. And I am four and three quarters. Why do some people not like others?

Eileen 20:36

Why do some people like strawberries and other people don't? You know, it's personal preference. And that's okay. They're allowed to choose. Maybe they don't like to do the same things you do. Maybe they already have as many friends as they want right now. That's okay. Friendships also change a lot for kids. There was one study that found that half of friendships in first grade don't make it from September to June. And one quarter of friendships in fourth grade and eighth grade don't last the full school year.

Jane 21:15

Let's talk a little bit about what you can do when things aren't feeling great within a friendship.

Katherine 21:21

I'm Katherine. I'm seven years old. I live in Maui, Hawaii. And I want to know, what can you do if a friend is being mean to you?

Halle 21:34

Hi, my name is Halle. I'm six years old. I live in Australia. How do you know if they are good friends? Or bad friends? I have some nice friends. And sometimes they're a little bit rude to me.

Mia 21:49

Hi, my name is Mia. I'm eight years old. I'm from Seattle, Washington. Why do you have friends but then they don't really, sometimes they don't pay attention to you?

Jane 22:03

What do you do if a friend is being mean to you? Or if you have a friend but they're not paying attention to you? Or if you have good friends and sometimes they're a little bit rude.

Eileen 22:14

Friendship is complicated. We're not perfect, and our friends aren't perfect either. So we're definitely going to face these friendship rough spots. And being a good friend means learning how to get through these friendship rough spots. Sometimes, that means you have to talk things out. Your friend can't read your mind, they may not realize that it really bothers them, bothers you, when they do whatever it is, or they call you that name. Or they don't call you back when you call them. Or they always make you be the horse and you don't want to be the horse. Whatever the game is, they can't know unless you tell them. You can speak up in a way that's respectful of both your friend and you. You can use an "I" statement. "I don't like it when you do that." And then be sure to ask for what you want. "From now on could you please..." But sometimes, to be a good friend, what we need to do is just forgive. Everybody has a bad day sometimes. Everybody makes mistakes, and sometimes just out of caring for the friend we need to let it go and move on.

Jane 23:29

Okay, so now we know about friends. And even sometimes what happens when friends aren't always kind to each other. But what's the difference between someone who's just being mean or being a bad friend and someone who's being a bully? We'll talk about bullies coming right up.

Jane 23:49

This is But Why: a Podcast for Curious Kids. I'm Jane Lindholm. Today, we're talking about relationships that are really important for kids and adults. We're talking about friends. And we're talking with Eileen Kennedy-Moore, also known as Dr. Friendtastic. She helps kids with all the kinds of issues that come up with friends and friendship. So we've learned that friendships take work, and that sometimes all of us make mistakes in how we treat our friends. But what if someone is being mean to you all the time? What's the difference between a bad friend and a bully?

Stirling 24:26

I'm Stirling and I'm seven years old and I'm from Toronto. And my question is, what if the bully does a bad thing twice? Would the bully be called a bully?

Solomon 24:45

I am Solomon and I'm five year old. I'm from Alexandria. How do you know someone is being a bully?

Eileen 24:55

Yeah. So scientists define bullying as deliberate meanness aimed at one particular person. Usually it happens over a period of time. But sometimes just one especially awful thing can count. But the most important difference is that there is a power difference between the kid doing the bullying and the kid being targeted. That power difference is what makes it difficult or impossible for the kid being targeted to deal with the situation on their own. So the kid doing the bullying is bigger, tougher, older, or more socially powerful. If that describes the situation that you're dealing with, you need to go to a grown up, this is not something that you should be handling on your own. On the other hand, if it's a conflict, maybe you're very upset about it, but there's no power difference between you and the other kid. That's something that you can handle, you may still want to go to your grown up and talk through different ideas about how to deal with it. But that is not bullying. And that's really important to understand. I had a kid in my practice, who came in and he said, I was bullied today. And I said, Oh, what happened. And he said, this kid, he told me quit making those annoying noises. That was not bullying.

Jane 26:25

It still feels bad.

Eileen 26:27

It still feels bad. But that is not a situation that he's being bullied, he's being dominated. And maybe the other kid could have said it in a kinder way. But this is a situation that kids can handle on their own.

Jane 26:41

And when you say it's important to know the difference between somebody who's being mean or a conflict you're having with a classmate or somebody else, it's important to know the difference between that and bullying. Why is it important to know the difference?

Eileen 26:55

If we call everything bullying, then we're kind of minimizing the very serious situations. So that's not right. And that's not fair. Also, I think it's not useful to just point fingers, "oh, he's a bully, He's a bully. She's a bully, they're a bully." That's not useful. And it's kind of looking in the wrong direction also. And most importantly, is because there are situations where adults need to step in and take care of things. So it's a safety issue. Everybody has the right to feel safe at school or in their neighborhoods. And sometimes we need adults to make sure that that happens.

Simon 27:38

My name is Simon. I'm 10 years old, and that question is when does it cross the line from teasing into bullying? My other question is, when is it tattling? And when is it okay to tell an adult when kids are being mean?

Eileen 27:49

Let's start with tattling. So there's a difference between tattling and telling. Tattling means you're trying to get the other person in trouble. Telling is when there's a situation that you really can't handle on your own and you're trying to get help. It's often a good idea to ask yourself some questions. Is someone getting hurt? Is something getting broken? Have I tried two ways to handle it on my own first? When it's real bullying, though, whether it's happening to you or you see it happening to another kid, there's a power difference and the more powerful kid is consistently picking on another kid, then it's important to tell an adult. Sometimes you see ideas that kid should stand up and say "Why stop that!" I don't like that idea unless you have the social power. Like if you're older and you see a younger kid bullying another younger kid. Yeah, then you can step in and say that's not cool.

Jane 27:49

Lots have you wondered about how to stay safe from people who are being mean to you or who are being bullies.

Rowan 29:02

Hello, my name is Rowan, I live in Springfield, Missouri. And four and a half. What do you do if a bully bothers you?

Ixaro 29:11

I am Ixaro. I am from Los Angeles, California. I'm six years old. Why are bullies bullies? And why? How do nice people go away from bullies? And how do nice people stay nice?

Wren 29:35

My name is Wren. I'm four years old. I live in New Jersey. What can you do about bullies?

Jane 29:47

If you're being bullied, you definitely need to tell someone. Here's some advice other kids have for us.

Matlida 29:55

Hi, my name is Matilda and I'm five years old. I'm from Colorado and my suggestion is, if someone's being mean to your friend tell the teacher.

Insiya 30:05

My name is Insiya. I'm from Massachusetts, and I'm 6 years old. And when someone bullies you, stand up for yourself and ask an adult to help you.

Chrisang 30:18

Hello, my name is Chrisang. I'm 11 years old, and I live in London, England, to answer your question, bullies are very annoying, whether cyberbullying, physical bullying, or verbal bullying.

Oliver 30:34

Hi, I'm Oliver. I live in Sydney, Australia. I'm six years old. And when you're dealing with a bully, I think you should say stop it, stop it. I don't like it. Or if that doesn't work, then you should just walk away.

Natalie 30:53

Hi, my name is Natalie. I'm eight and a half years old. And I live in Rutherford, New Jersey. And the way I act to bullies is I stop, act, and report. Stop what you're doing. If you see a bully, act to a bully by saying stop, it's not nice. And if he or she is still doing it, try reporting to a teacher.

Danya 31:20

I'm Danya and I live in New South Wales, Australia and I'm 10. I've had a lot of bullies along the way and how I dealt with them is by being kind and it helps to have a mum or dad to be there. And now my bully is my friend.

Eleanor 31:36

Hi, my name is Eleanor. I live in Bellingham, Washington, and I'm six years old. And my suggestion to deal with bullies is to put up signs or stand up for yourself and get a teacher if you need help.

Josie 32:03

Hello, my name is Josie. I'm six years old. I live in Manchester, Vermont. My suggestion is if someone's being mean to you say let's take a minute and we'll discuss this after we're ready so that we feel better and we're ready to talk to each other.

Jane 32:34

Remember how Dr. Fantastic said the difference between someone being mean and someone bullying is that a bully has more power than the person they're bullying? That's something some of you have picked up on.

Dylan 32:47

My name is Dylan. I'm 10 years old and I'm from Mesa, Arizona. Why do bullies like bully certain people? Or like they only bully the people that, like, they're not cool, like the popular kids don't get really bullied.

Kairan 33:08

My name is Kairan. I live in Kigali, Rwanda. I am nine years old. Why do bullies choose to have certain friends and bully other people?

Dexter 33:22

My name is Dexter. My age is six. I live in Illinois. Why are bullies bullies and friends friends?

Avery 33:31

My name is Avery. My age is six. And I live in Arvada in Colorado in the United States. Why do like bullies pick on people? And some people they don't pick on?

Eileen 33:53

Why do they pick on those kids? Because they can. And that is a really terrible answer. And so we as a community, need to support everyone. One thing that tends to lead to bullying is what I call empathy blind spots. And these are the things that we tell ourselves that make us think, oh, that person's feelings don't count. Maybe they're annoying. Maybe you just don't like them. Maybe they're younger, whatever the excuses we have to recognize that that's an excuse. And everybody has dignity. Everybody needs to be treated with kindness. So if you find yourself thinking some of those excuses, catch yourself and say, I'm not going there. I'm going to treat everyone with kindness. With my kids I used to say you don't have to like everybody, but you must treat them with kindness.

Deen 34:52

My name is Deen. I am six years old. I live in Levittown, Long Island. Why do some people choose to be a bully?

Jannah 35:06

My name is Jannah. I'm three years old and I live in New York. Why do some people act like bullies?

Halid 35:19

My name is Halid. I'm six years old. And I lived in the United Arab Emirates. My question is, why did some people choose to be bullies and some people don't?

Jane 35:34

Here's how other kids answered that question.

Diego 35:36

My name is Diego. I live in Sydney for now. I'm seven years old. And I know why bullies are bullies, because they're scared of what they don't know.

Libby 35:54

Hello, I'm Libby. I'm nine years old and nobody chooses to be a bully. And even if someone is a bully, they probably don't think they are one. If you're being bullied, go tell someone like a teacher, your parent, or there's someone older that might help you sort out what's happening. Thank you for listening to this.

Jane 36:12

And here's Dr. Fantastic.

Eileen 36:14

Now remember that we all make mistakes. So sometimes it's just a mistake, and they don't realize the impact of how their actions are affecting other people. Sometimes, it's because of these empathy blind spots that they think somebody's feelings don't count. We all need to constantly be choosing to be kind. And this is true in families. This is true in marriages. It's certainly true in our world. And it starts with how we treat the people around us and when we're kids. That's how we learn to get along with other people.

Reuven 36:57

My name is Reuven and I live in BC, Gibson's, Canada, how do bullies learn to be good persons?

Jane 37:10

One way for bullies to learn how to not be bullies anymore is to talk to other adults about what's going on in their lives. Sometimes there are things happening that they need to discuss with adults and maybe get some help with. But whether we're talking about bullies or people who are maybe just not being a very kind friend, and maybe don't even know about it in certain moments, one way to improve is to work on the skills of empathy. Empathy is kind of feeling what another person would feel like so putting yourself in their shoes, as we like to say, how would you feel if someone said that thing to you? Or did that thing to you? And if you can think, well, I would feel bad. If that happened to me, then don't do that thing, right?

Eileen 37:55

That's exactly right. And what makes kids grow in their friendship skills. From like, the toddler friendships where it's kind of "love the one you're with," to the more intimate and long lasting friendships of the teen years, is a growing ability to understand somebody else's point of view, to be able to put ourselves in their shoes. And imagine how would I feel? What do you what do I imagine that they might be thinking? Or how do I think that they might react, if that happens, or when that happens.

Jane 38:28

And Dr. Friendtastic had one last really helpful, concrete thing you can do. If you're being teased or bullied.

Eileen 38:36

One of the things that you can do is to either stand near a grown up, or stand near friends. And this is just a really practical strategy to make it less likely that you will be targeted. I'm not defending the bullying or the teasing or anything, but just as a practical way, being near somebody who could stick up for you.

Jane 38:59

Hmm, yeah. So that you can't, you're not sort of out on your own where the adults aren't going to hear it, or a friend doesn't hear it and can say, let's go over here. Let's get out of there.

Eileen 39:09

Yeah, making friends is actually a protective factor. You're less likely to be bullied if you have friends. So that's, that's a good strategy.

Jane 39:18

You sent us a couple other unique questions about friendship that we want to tackle before we end this episode.

Owen 39:24

My name is Owen. I'm nine years old. I live in my Hawaii. How can I help my friend when my friend is afraid?

Eileen 39:33

Well, first of all, you've already done something wonderful, which is noticing the friend strong feelings. That's terrific. Like we all want to feel seen and heard. So that is a very, very caring thing to do. Obviously, you don't want to if your friend is scared, you don't want to tease them about that, or you know, do things to scare them more. But often the best thing to do is to ask your friend, what can I do to help? The friend knows what they need. Sometimes kids feel like they need to fix the situation. Usually, that's not what we want from a friend. We want our friends to understand, just listening is often a really good thing. But your friend might also have some practical things about well, can you go with me when I do whatever it is I do. And that would be a lovely and caring thing to do.

Jane 40:30

We should probably note too, that if what your friend is afraid of seems dangerous, or like they are in an unsafe situation, or they're afraid of somebody who's making them feel unsafe, you should tell an adult.

Eileen 40:42

Absolutely. There are a lot of situations that are not for kids to solve. They're too complicated or too scary or too dangerous. And then you need to go to a trusted adult.

Ella 40:55

Hi, my name is Ella. I'm seven years old. I live in Hayward, Illinois. What do you do when you're when you miss your friend?

Jane 41:05

Missing people we care about is one of the hardest things about love and friendship, isn't it, Ella, there's no magic way to stop missing someone. But you can try some things to maybe make it a little easier to bear. If your friend doesn't live nearby, you could ask your adults to help you stay in touch by calling or video chatting or even writing to them. One thing I used to do with one of my friends who lived far away was I recorded myself talking to them. Sometimes I would sing a song or read a poem, or I would just tell them how my day was going. This was way back in the olden days of 2000, more than 20 years ago. So we didn't have cell phones, or any way to video chat in the way a lot of kids do now. So I used something called a tape cassette, I would record one side of the tape cassette, it was an actual physical thing you had to put in a tape recorder. And I would spend a couple of days recording things and record a whole side of the tape cassette. And when that was all filled up, I would send it to my friend. And then she would spend a few days recording the other side and send it back to me. And it was so great, because not only was I hearing her voice, but I felt like I was kind of included in some of the things that she was doing throughout the week. So you could try doing something like that with a friend of yours. You could keep a picture of your friend nearby so you can look at them whenever you feel sad. And you can definitely talk to your adults about this. They can help you find a way to keep in touch with your friend. It may not make you miss them any less. But maybe it can help you feel more connected. Here's one more friend question.

Cyprus 42:41

My name is Cyprus. I'm nine years old. I live in Fort Wayne, Indiana. What age do people have the most friends?

Jane 42:49

Actually, there's been some research on this. And the technical answer is when you're 25 years old, that's when you have the most friends. That doesn't apply to everyone of course, but on average, that seems to be the answer. But Dr. Friendtastic says friends and friendships are something people work on for their entire lives.

Eileen 43:08

The number one reaction I get to my book Growing Friendships is this applies to adults and like yes, it's not like at age nine, we've mastered everything about friendship. In new relationships and new situations, adults are constantly learning about being good friends and making new friends.

Jane 43:27

That was Dr. Friendtastic, also known as Eileen Kennedy-Moore. She's the author of the book Growing Friendships, and she has a great website where she answers more kids questions about friendships, you can have an adult help you find it. If you want to learn more, we have a link to it in our show notes. And that'll do it for today's episode. If you have a question about anything, remember, you can always send it to us having an adult recorded. It's easy to do on a smartphone using a free voice recording app. Be sure to include your first name, where you live and how old you are. Then you can email the file to questions@ButWhyKids.org We wish we could answer every question we get and we can't but we do love hearing them all and knowing what's on your mind. But Why is produced by Melody Bodette and me Jane Lindholm at Vermont Public. Our theme music is by Luke Reynolds and we had extra music today from Blue Dot Sessions. We'll be back in two weeks with an all new episode. Until then, stay curious.