



Friendship crosses all boundaries

Friendship. It's a word we all know and value. It's the state of enduring affection, esteem, intimacy, and trust between two people. But where does it start? And where does it end?

The first step is when you spot similarities between you and someone else immediately and begin to wonder whether you would get along with them. Then, you start talking. You realise that you have a lot more in common than you thought. However, this may not always be the case. There may be an initial awkwardness. Then slowly, slowly but surely, you begin to understand each other. You begin to understand every word, every action, every expression, until it becomes so familiar that it's like you'd known them for years.

You learn so much about each other and soon your worlds begin to amalgamate. Every time you walk into a room, your eyes instantly start searching for them, your smile widening as soon as you catch sight of them, you expel a sigh of relief. Outside, you are chalk and cheese, inside, there is a connection that brings you together. If there's a problem between you, you handle it maturely, knowing to give the other personal space and time to work it out. If one is upset, the other will always be by their side, no matter what. If you feel like the friendship is weakening, you will reconcile by fixing it together. Soon, you begin to question what your life would've been like without them. It dawns on you that there is no longer a singular you, only plural.

Unfortunately, some friendships are temporary. But the effects of it can be long-lasting. In the summer of 1914, the European nations went to war with enthusiasm, believing that the war would end by Christmas of that year. It did not and thousands died. On the 25th December, Christmas Day, as dawn broke, German soldiers rose from their trenches, waving their arms to show no malice. They were quickly joined by the British soldiers, and together they exchanged gifts, played football, shared food and even sang carols, with those who had been their mortal enemies just a day earlier. A Christmas Truce. A truce built on the foundations of a new friendship. A friendship no one expected amidst the animosity of the war. And although this friendship was only able to survive for a short time, it emphasised the fact that friendship does not only have to be a spark between two similar sides, friendship can cross borders.

This goes to show that friendship can knock down any barrier, can leap over any hurdle. No matter what race, gender or social background you come from, a true friend will always see and appreciate you as you. The trust built in a true friendship is unbreakable and can withstand any obstacles that may come in its way. Friends may drift apart over the years, the friendship may make you laugh or even make you cry, but the memories created together can last a lifetime. Friendship is a relationship that transcends all boundaries, a strange bond which finally sets you free.

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The pros and cons of social media friendships

The World Health Organisation defines health as a state of 'complete physical, mental and social well-being' rather than just the absence of disease and sickness. Friendship is the single most important thing affecting our mental well-being because relying on social connections is how humanity has always coped with grief and hardship. Having good friendships is essential at all stages of life, however it's when you are a child that making friends is crucial as it's a catalyst for development and aids the ability to form mature relationships.

When you enter your teenage years, the way that we connect to our friends' changes; the introduction of technology and social media opens up new methods of making friends. Unfortunately, there are many negatives to social media, particularly if you solely rely on online connections rather than real-life physical friendships. Teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 spend the most time on social media, with time averaging at three hours a day. Some teens spend as much as nine hours a day on apps such as TikTok and Instagram. But what effect does social media have on our ability to form friendships?

When observing our biological ability to make friends, we can deduce that whilst social media allows us to have more connections and build a larger network, it ends up draining our energy to maintain real-person relationships. According to Dunbar, a psychologist, this is because 'our brains are only capable of handling around 150 friends, including family members'. His conclusions were based on conducting brain scans of peoples' neocortex (the part of the brain that manages relationships). Of course, most people have over 150 friends just on TikTok and our abundance of online friendships may end up damaging our ability to keep up with our 'real' friends. Many lonely teenagers turn to social media in order to prevent their loneliness when, in reality, it can have the opposite effect and actually push themselves deeper into their pit of loneliness.

On a more cheerful note, there are ways in which social media can be harnessed as a force for good. We can keep in touch with friends that have moved far away and we can make social plans much more easily and efficiently than our grandparents would have been able to 60 years ago. So, social media can be a valuable tool. Social media can also be leveraged to build positive online reputations that sixth forms and universities may find impressive for later on in life. In conclusion, social media is a double-edged sword for our generation – depending on how you use it.



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