



Friendship, belonging and peer norms

In Years 6 and 7, your social life can change or feel complicated, and sometimes it can feel confusing. You are not alone in feeling this way. This resource will help you understand it better.

How do friendship groups shape the way we treat each other?

Friendship groups don't stay the same forever. People make new friends, spend less time with old ones, join different activities and sometimes move between groups. This is a normal part of growing up.

Most friendship groups have unspoken rules. Nobody says these rules out loud, but you learn them by spending time with the group. These rules can be about how people joke with each other, what people share, who sits together or how people talk and act.

Some of these unspoken rules can help you feel like you belong. But other unspoken rules can make you feel left out or unsafe. Sometimes you might feel pressure to join in, stay quiet or laugh at a joke you don't find funny. You might also feel pressure to agree with others just to fit in.

The same thing happens online. Group chats, games and comments often have their own unspoken rules.

You do not have to follow these unspoken rules or do what everyone else is doing. You can choose thoughtfully and practise kindness and empathy.

'A lot of friendship groups have unspoken rules. Nobody sits you down and explains them, but you learn them quickly because you notice what gets people accepted and what gets them left out.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Where do I fit in?

Your role in your friendship group can change over time. You don't have to change who you are to fit in. A healthy friendship group accepts people for who they are.

Think about:

- ◉ What is my role in my friendship group?
- ◉ Does my role in my friendship group change in different situations?
- ◉ Do I feel like myself in my group, or do I act differently to fit in?

Having good friends can make a real difference in your life. Good friends help you feel included and comfortable being yourself. They celebrate your wins and support you through hard times.

'Belonging shouldn't feel like something you have to constantly earn.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

When things feel uncomfortable

Sometimes, friendship groups can feel unsafe, confusing or unkind. This happens to many young people. Noticing when something feels wrong in your group is an important skill. It is important to trust that feeling.

What shapes how people treat each other?

Sometimes people want to belong so much that they act in ways they are not proud of. This can happen when they fear being left out or feel social pressure. Many people your age feel this way.

Sometimes bullying and other harmful behaviours are aimed at someone because of who they are. It can be about their background, how they look, their culture or other things about their identity. Bullying based on someone's identity can be especially hurtful. Bullying and other harmful behaviours are never okay.

'There's a difference between belonging and fitting in. Trying to fit in with people in your group can become harmful if you're fundamentally changing who you are. Staying true to who you are while still being able to find friendship – it's a difficult skill.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
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Note

Talk to a trusted adult if you or someone else needs help. You can also contact a support organisation listed in 'Where to get more help' at the end of this resource.



What can I do?

- ◉ Think about how your friendship group includes people or where this might not be happening. Do they make sure everyone is involved in a chat or game? Do they value people's differences?
- ◉ Choose actions that match your values, even if this means doing things differently to everyone else. That takes courage, but it is worth it.
- ◉ Practise kindness and empathy. For example, treat others how you would like to be treated.
- ◉ Speak to a trusted adult if something doesn't feel right.

Go to the 'Connected resources' section for more help understanding friendship and group dynamics and what you can do.

Connected resources

- ◉ What kind of upstander am I?
- ◉ How do I support someone?
- ◉ Something is off: identifying early signs
- ◉ What is harmful behaviour and how to make things better
- ◉ What's stopping me?

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety or overwhelm, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Counselling and guidance for children and young people experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76 or 13yarn.org.au. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people): 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

eSafety Commissioner: esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via their website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local polices and school context.