

## Peer Relationships



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls with navigating friendships and peer relationships:*

- ⇒ Her friendship group may best be identified in terms of the common interests she shares with her peers. For example, if she is a “gamer“ or is “arty“ then she may gravitate more towards girls who share these interests as well.
- ⇒ Respect that peer relationships come in different forms and this is ok. On observation she may be the loudest in a group, may have more friends that are boys. She may have one close friend or may have lots of friends. She may prefer to spend time on her own or might be selective with friendships. She may have more friends who are older than her or friends that are younger.
- ⇒ Help her to understand that a friend does not want to play with her on a particular day it does not mean that they are no longer friends. Just like she may need space or time out her friends may need the same.
- ⇒ Have a peer system in place that helps her in social situations. Implement a buddy system at school or ask other children who are socially aware to help her navigate social situation.
- ⇒ Encourage her to be herself rather than try and fit in. She will more likely attract meaningful friendships with peers who think like she does and who have similar common interests.
- ⇒ Work with her to choose a classroom and playground buddy so she has a built in ally or ‘go to person’ that can support her in unstructured times.
- ⇒ Create a culture at the school that promotes inclusion for all e.g., set up a friendship bench, reading nook or lunchtime clubs that provide more opportunities for semi-structured play during social times.

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- ➔ Provide explicit teaching about how she can join groups, how she can check to see what the children are playing, how to leave a group if she no longer wants to be a part of the game e.g., use social stories.
- ➔ Understand she might find it easier to connect with students who are older or younger than herself rather than students her own age. Allow her to access all play areas if she wants to.
- ➔ Girls who have just one or two very intense friendships may need help widening their circle and understanding why this matters. Help them find other young people or peers with shared interests.
- ➔ Remember that autistic expressions of friendship may sometimes look different to the 'norm', but are equally valid and authentic. Inclusion goes both ways, and it is important to teach neurotypical students to be truly inclusive and accepting of their neurodivergent peers."

*For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, which is a supplement to 'Spotlight on Girls with Autism: Supporting Autistic Girls at School' website, we are using the pronouns 'she/her'. Yellow Ladybugs recognises all gender identities and we emphasise that this information may also be relevant to autistic cis-boys and gender diverse autistic individuals, and equally that this information may not always be applicable to all autistic girls/women.*