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**Workshops:**  
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Hello everyone,  
Welcome to term four. I trust that you are all feeling relaxed after the holidays and ready to start work with renewed energy. This newsletter will focus on the

importance of friendship skills and I endeavour to give you some strategies and teaching tips to use with the students.

Anna Tullemans

## Value of Friendship

- Friendship teaches you:
  - Conflict skills
  - To learn different and alternative perspectives
  - To learn alternative solutions
  - Team work skills
- Friendship can be an antidote to depression
- Friendship will help prevent bullying. (one person alone will be more a target than a group of people)

## Why making friends can be difficult

Making friends can be a difficult task due to the nature of ASD:

- The lack of:
  - Communication skills
  - Emotional empathy
  - Emotional control
- Not understanding the idea or concept of small talk
- The way that ASD people misinterpret 'invitations' to play or 'invitations' to conversations
- Their 'unintentional disinclines' to play socially, due to sensory issues, or "I'm not coping" behaviours

## 3 Areas to focus on when teaching friendship skills

There are three main areas we need to focus on when teaching friendship skills: They are:

- Teach conversations skills (ie give them conversation starters and openers such as: "wow that's a fantastic train, dinosaur, book, hair tie ....."). The right conversation starter can open doors to friendship. They are also valuable as they create a good impression. It tells others that you are approachable and open and promotes common ground
- Teach social skills
- Create friendship opportunities

## Friendships (© Anna Tullemans 2008)

Friendships can be a difficult area to negotiate, and even for us as typical adults our friendships change and metamorphous, some quickly, some so slowly that we don't notice the changes at first. As we grow older and wiser as people, so does our idea and understanding of friendships grow and change. Unfortunately this is not so true for ASD people, for as is the nature of ASD, change is difficult to understand and comprehend.

As we teach friendship skills, we also need to teach that friendships grow **and** change, so we also need to guide them through the different stages of friendships as some friendships wane and others become much closer. This can be taught if you have established a mentor relationship with the student.

### Tips on teaching friendship skills

Teach the child:

- Which behaviours signal that another person is available for friendship, eg positive remarks from that person, physical proximity, positive comments directed toward the ASD person, offers of help
- How to respond to these signals
- Which behaviours signal that he/she is available for friendship eg positive remarks to that person, offer of help with maths, finding a classroom, etc
- Conversational starters
- To understand the differences between good natured teasing and bullying and harassment. This requires them looking at the “Big Picture” to see what is happening around them. Provide them with the skills to ‘investigate’ what happened before, during and after to help them work out which one it is.
- That friendship comes in different shapes and forms.
- That different friendships bring different benefits and pleasures. Use your own experiences and talk about the kinds of friendships you experience. You have a friend at the gym where you work out together, but you don't necessarily see her socially outside this arena. You have a friend with whom you have long chats and cups of coffee with. You have a friend, a work colleague that you share experiences with, but you don't see socially outside of work.
- That we have many acquaintances but not many true friends
- That true friendships develop over time
- That you can have:
  - Activity friends
  - Special interest friends
  - Intellectual friends
  - Go – to friends
  - Close to home friends
  - School friends/music friends, horse riding friends etc



### Adolescent Friendships are based on...What?

When putting together friendship programmes we must remember that adolescent friendships (especially among boys) are not based on talking, but upon **doing things together**.

- Look for activities that relate to the adolescents passion and interests. It gives the adolescent the opportunity to observe others and eventually make connections
- Encourage the adolescent to invite others to join him in games that have inherent structure such as bowling games etc. It's easier to interact around a few games of bowling rather than hanging out at home where the structure has to be more planned.
- When the activity is to be at home, organise it around a certain task or activity eg checking out the new X - Box game, baking biscuits, building a fort in the backyard

## **Create opportunities for friendships** (© Anna Tullemans 2008)

There are many times and places where we can create opportunities for friendship. We need to find these opportunities in places where the ASD person feels comfortable and not force the situation. What I mean is that we create an opportunity while the ASD person is engaging in an activity that they enjoy.

- Class times:
  - Use his special interest. Allow him to introduce some - one else to his special interest so they can share ideas etc.
- Teach them to teach others. People respect and like to associate with others who are good at something. This gives them “social currency” This currency needs to be one that others respect.
- Help friendships along by increasing their “social currency”
- Clubs: (Special Interest) Match individuals with similar interests
  - Computer, Music, Entomology
  - They don't have to be formal, but they do need to be supervised
- Library:
  - Reading club, research club, showing other students/peers about favourite subject (but not another adult), play games
- Rent – a – friend: This is where you invite a friend to play, and when the ASD child leaves, the parent steps in and plays with the child and then when the ASD child is ready to step back in, the parent quietly moves away. This way both children have a good time and the friend will want to return.
- Playing soccer:
  - Teach the micro skills of playing soccer
  - Use two or three students who can play to help teach him

## **Feeding and Maintaining Friendships** (© Anna Tullemans 2008)

Even when ASD people have friendships, they sometimes forget the need to maintain that relationship and consequently it falls away.

- Remind them to reciprocate invitations. One friendship went by the wayside because Daniel didn't reciprocate with invitations to his own house as he thought that Jon would be bored. Daniel didn't have all the cool stuff to play with so didn't think to invite Jon to his house, however Jon just thought that Daniel didn't like him anymore so stopped inviting him to play.
- Remind them to invite friends to the movies, or to play.
- Before the day help the child to think about what the friend might like to do and what he might like to eat, or games to play
- After the get together ask the child what he thought his friend liked or disliked. Help him to link his thoughts with feelings.
- Do an investigation into friendship. This will also help to develop problem solving skills.

When a friendship has formed many ASD people will forget to maintain and reciprocate this friendship. We need to give them “ideas” and “how to instructions”. We need to remind them with each new situation so they can build up a repertoire of scenarios where they will feel comfortable in using these “instructions”. Examples are:

- Keeping in touch – how often do you call and talk?
  - “Thanks for coming. I had a great time playing X – Box games”
- Seek out a friend at lunchtime. Teach him to:
  - Ask what the friend is doing, how was the soccer game etc



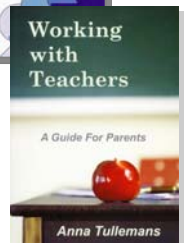
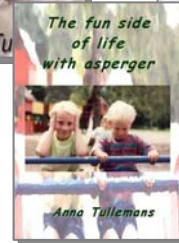
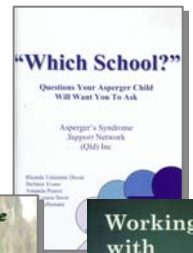
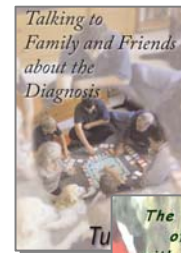
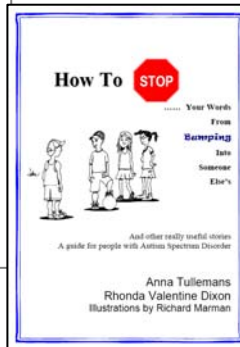
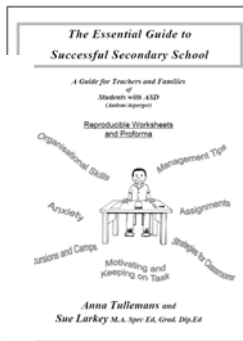
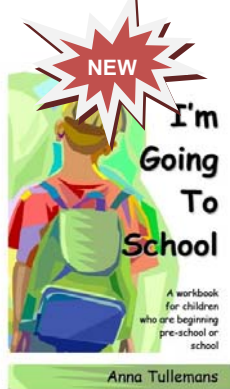
## Managing Conflict in Friendship

“Ah no! My friend doesn’t like me anymore....! And I don’t know why.”

Managing conflict is not easy even when it is with your best friend. For some individuals with ASD an argument can be the end of a friendship. We need to teach some easy conflict resolution skills such as:

- Discuss what it means when people disagree
- Reinforce beliefs that make sense – “we can disagree and still be friends”
- Talk in a logical and data based way. Talk about the evidence of the argument. What is the evidence from a past argument, what is the evidence of others who have remained friends after a small disagreement?
- Teach ways to clarify and repair communication: “Do you mean \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?” “I didn’t get it; I thought you were saying.....”
- Teach the ASD person how to make sincere apologies
- Remember to teach techniques such as taking a break when tempers run too hot.
- Model and reinforce letting go of a conflict once it is resolved. Use CBT such as placing the conflict in a box and placing it on a shelf, or throwing it into the bin.

Books authored by Anna Tullemans – see [www.annatullemans.com](http://www.annatullemans.com)



To order books please email Anna on: [annatullemans@gmail.com](mailto:annatullemans@gmail.com)

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