

Peer Relationships & Friendships

Why are friendships complicated for pupils with ASD?

Most pupils at King's Park want to make friends but face significant difficulties with forming and maintaining peer relationships.

Some students struggle with negotiating friendship groups and need support to develop their social communication skills. Here are some examples of friendship difficulties:-

- Initiating conversations or being able to express how they are feeling
- Awareness that others have thoughts / intentions differing from theirs
- Struggle with motivation to engage in activities that are not of interest
- Lack of awareness and understanding of non-verbal communication - facial expressions and body language
- Difficulties with managing conflict resolution
- Lack of awareness and understanding of social boundaries – inappropriate behaviour / language
- Difficulties with managing friendship breakdowns – accepting support i.e. restorative approach
- Understanding and accepting others perspectives
- Managing unstructured times (break and lunch) including busy and noisy spaces
- Difficulties with conversation turn-taking
- Managing group situations – social interaction with others that have different needs
- Rigid thinking – friendships have not worked out in the past so why bother making friends...

Why is it particularly hard to have friendships in a school setting?



In a school setting where all students are autistic and have social communication difficulties, it can be difficult for them to form and maintain friendships as they all have differing needs.

Understanding the social world can be complicated for a young person with autism. Some young people with autism have difficulty expressing and communicating their needs to adults when they need support.

In addition, Some of our students experience difficulty with transitioning i.e. shifting from task to task, lesson to lesson i.e. change of teacher / subject / environment, as well as transitioning from unstructured time (break & lunch) back to learning.

What happens at break time/lunch time at KP?



At break and lunch time students have the opportunity to spend time with other students that are not in their form class or year group. Break and lunchtimes can be anxiety provoking for some students *or* time to recharge and regulate for others. However, this free-time has an element of lack of structure and some students find it hard to successfully navigate the increased social interactions and expectations.

How do KP staff deal with any behaviour that is considered bullying?



We have a zero tolerance bullying policy at King's Park. However, what may sometimes be perceived as bullying is in fact be poor social communication skills some of which are named over the page. We are a trauma informed school and practice a restorative approach to mediate conflict resolution.

What does King's Park do to support pupils with friendships and possible bullying?

Weekly RSHE lessons teach our students about a variety of different relationships.



During break and lunch times a number of staff are on duty interacting with students and modelling social skills.

Pastoral staff work with students 1:1 or in pairs to support conflict resolution and timetable social communication skills groups where students can learn skills through play (games and playing cards etc.)

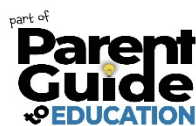
King's Park and Parents working in partnership to support healthy peer relationships



At King's Park we are proud to have successfully built a welcoming school community.

We recognise the importance of working with the family as a whole, not just the student, to build better outcomes for all. We know our students and families well, and these home school relationships strengthen the student's ability to manage healthy relationships in school.

What can parents do to support pupils with friendships in school?



How to help your child understand friendships:-

1. Help your child understand what a friend is

This may seem basic, but your child needs to know what a friend is. S/he/they can't be a friend unless they can explain what one is. Keep things simple. Ask questions like, "Do you like being around people who call you names?" and "Do you like being around people who say nice things to you?" Be literal when you can. Use clear, plain language like, "friends are nice to you and say things that make you feel better when you have a bad day."

2. Visual models like social stories

Young people with autism often learn better when they can see or read what they're supposed to do. Social stories guide a child through a specific situation using pictures and words. Writing a script or drawing out the flow of a conversation can help your child understand the basics of how to talk to a friend.

3. Practice, practice, practice

Young people with autism need a little more time and repetition to learn a new skill. Practicing with your child can help them feel more comfortable with the process and problem-solve any "bumps" before she encounters them in real time. Practice different aspects of making a friend, like asking questions, answering questions, sharing things or suggesting an activity. Have your child practice with siblings, neighbours or similar-age cousins. Select people who are going to be patient and know your child well—you want your child to feel safe while practicing.

4. Surround your child with kids who share her interests

Common interests are important factors in developing and maintaining friendships. It's hard to be friends with someone you have nothing in common with. Make sure these groups have similar-aged peers so they are surrounded by age-appropriate behaviour.

5. Focus on long-term success

Developing new skills takes time. Nothing happens overnight. Social skills continue to develop as your child gets older. Making friends looks very different for a 4 year old than it does for a 14 year old. Keep practicing this skill with your child to help her continue to develop age-appropriate social skills.