



BACKGROUND NOTES: FRIENDSHIPS

As young people try to understand the changes they experience in adolescence they often become more and more attached to their friends who are going through the same changes. They seek acceptance and respect from these friends. During this time it is important to feel like they belong to a group. They often do things for the sake of pleasing friends and will follow most of what peers tell them, wanting to feel like part of their peer group. At the same time, many young people find it difficult to completely ignore adults since they live with their parents and still want to please them.

Young people's behaviour can be strongly influenced by their peers. If friends smoke, drink alcohol or make other unhealthy choices, in all likelihood they will do the same to be accepted by the group. But peers can also be helpful. They provide opportunities for adult-like relationships. They form a reference group for judging behaviour and help young people clarify personal identities. They should choose friends and relationships that are going to develop their personality positively.

Friendship can provide a source of support beyond what family or peer groups can offer. Adolescents may spend time with just one friend or a small group of friends. These friends can be quite important. They can help young people share ideas, thoughts and experiences without fear or betrayal. They may share experiences about bodily changes, which help them feel normal. In such friendly groupings, adolescents can explore and discover themselves as people; which is part of the search for identity. Adolescents tend to select friends with characteristics similar to their own as a way of confirming their own opinions and sense of self worth.