

How to Be a Good Friend

What makes a good friend?

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A good friend is helpful, kind, and fun! Being a good friend to an autistic kid is just like being a good friend to anyone else, but it can be nice for your friend to know that you understand autism and want to support them. Here are some tips on how to do that:

1 Ask them to join you!

- It can be hard for autistic kids to reach out, so invite them to play with you, sit with you at lunch, or hang out after school.
- Ask them questions and tell them about yourself!

2 Be patient.

- Autistic kids may not answer right away when you talk to them. Be patient and wait for their response. They also may not look at you when you talk to them, but it doesn't mean they're not listening!

- Some autistic people use letter boards or computers to talk. Don't be nervous about these tools – they work like a voice for the people who use them. If you need help understanding your friend's tools, ask an adult.
- Be direct and kind. If your friend is doing something you don't like, tell them to "please stop." If you do like something, be sure to tell them that, too!
- An autistic friend may need more downtime than others, so give them space when they ask for it.
- They may talk about one thing for a long time because they aren't sure how to change topics. If you want to talk about something else, ask your friend if they would like to hear about something you like.



3 Let them control the conversation about autism.

- a. Some kids want everyone to know they are autistic. Others don't. Avoid telling other people unless your friend says that it's okay.
- b. If you don't understand something your friend does or says, don't make assumptions about their actions or thoughts – just ask them!
- c. Your autistic friend may be upset by sounds, textures, or smells that don't bother you at all, but it's important to believe them when they say something hurts or is hard. At the same time, you don't have to assume certain things will bother them just because they're autistic.
- d. If your friend doesn't talk much or at all, look at their face and body language to see how they are feeling. The better friends you become, the easier it will be for you to read these signals!

4 Embrace your differences.

- a. Autism is not a bad thing: it's a way that people are different. Difference is great—it's what makes us special! Celebrate the things that make your friend both different from and similar to you.
- b. How are you different?

5 Take a stand against bullying.

- a. If your friend is being picked on, stick up for them! It's important to stand up for them even when they aren't around or if you have to tell your other friends to stop.
- b. Talk with your friends about how you can address the bullying as a group, or tell an adult you trust.
- c. Sometimes, autistic people may not realize that they're being mocked or manipulated. That doesn't mean that the bullying is harmless!
- d. Autistic people are more likely to have been bullied in the past, so they may be more sensitive to teasing. If you think you may have accidentally hurt their feelings, ask them if they're okay.
- e. Join or start a "spread the word to end the word" campaign at your school.

6 Learn more about autism.

- a. Ask your teacher or another adult to help you find more information about autism. There are lots of great resources out there about how you can support autistic people! The more you know, the easier it is to be a good friend!

