

LOOKING AFTER YOUR FRIENDS

STUDENT HANDOUT

Table of contents

What's this about?	3
Activity 1: Being a good friend	4
Activity 2: Looking after yourself	6
Activity 3: Noticing what's going on	7
Activity 4: Panel video	8
Activity 5: Starting a conversation	9
Activity 6: Helpful ideas on having a conversation	11
Activity 7: Listening skills	12
Activity 8: Following up	14
Activity 9: Tricky questions	16
Activity 10: Looking after yourself	18
Sites and services	19
Looking after your friends	19
Seeking help	19

What's this about?

Our friends are important to us. Like us, they will go through some ups and downs in their life and will probably need a friend in their corner at some point. Sometimes you may not be sure how to help a friend who may be struggling, so the following activities are about giving you some practical information on what you can do if you are worried about a friend. The suggestions are just some things to think about – they are not meant to be the only way you can help. Because you know your friend – you are likely to know which suggestions could work best.



You're going to watch a couple of interesting videos and take part in some discussion and activities with your classmates and teacher. During these activities you may have some questions, or they may bring up some issues that you want to talk to someone about. Your teacher, or another trusted adult at school, will be able to provide some guidance about concerns you may have. You may also like to find out more information from the websites listed at the end of this handout, or choose to contact someone from the support services also listed.

Activity 1: Being a good friend

The adventures of *SuperFriend*

It's great to have a friend looking out for you – someone who will listen to you and has your best interests at heart. Someone like *SuperFriend*...



Out of the blue, and just when you least need it, *SuperFriend* comes to the rescue. Not content to be just a regular buddy, *SuperFriend* has set his sights on fixing all your problems.

Work with a partner and draw up a *SuperFriend* scenario:

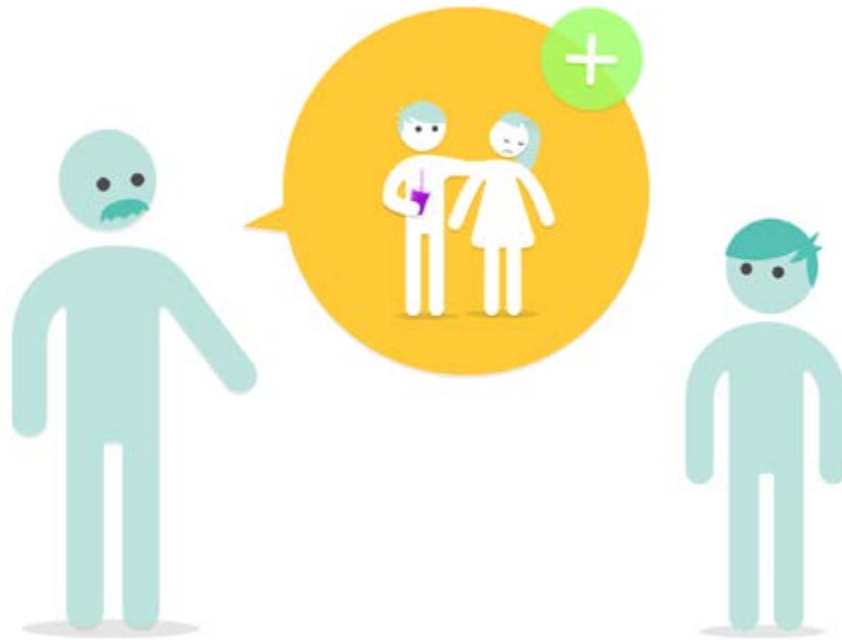


Honestly, *SuperFriend's* heart is in the right place. He just doesn't seem to understand that being a good friend is more than solving people's problems.

Your teacher will show you a short animation, which talks about how you don't need to be *SuperFriend* to be a good friend.

Activity 2: Looking after yourself

- Being a good friend means being good to yourself too.
- It can be stressful to be worried about a friend, so keep an eye on how you are feeling.
- Asking for help from other people you care about can help reduce the pressure on you.
- Keeping up with the normal things that you do to stay happy and healthy is important.



Activity 3: Noticing what's going on

Sometimes, it can be difficult to notice what's going on for someone else. There's so much going on for each of us that it can be hard to stop and see that something has changed for a friend.

If you do notice changes in your friends, it could mean they are having a few problems. What sort of changes do you think might indicate a friend is struggling?



With your class, brainstorm behaviours that may be warning signs that a friend is having some troubles. List your ideas.

Possible warning signs

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Activity 4: Panel video

Your teacher will show you a video of people talking about having conversations with their friends about how they are feeling. As you watch the video, listen to one of the panellists, Ash, tell her story of helping a friend and take note of the following:

- What were the changes in behaviour that Ash noticed in her friend?
- How did Ash start a conversation with her friend about these changes?

Behavioural changes	Starting a conversation

Activity 5: Starting a conversation

Having a conversation

Having a conversation with a friend is perhaps the simplest and most effective thing you can do if you are worried about them. But is there anything you should consider before talking with them? Where should you talk? When should you talk?

Have a look through the following checklist with your group. See if you can work out the best combination of conditions for starting a conversation with a friend. Discuss why you made the choices you did and what you think made the other choices less appropriate.



Location	Who is present?	Planning
In the corridor between classes	Just you	Bring information on mental health supports to show your friend
During study time in the library	You and a few friends who are all concerned	Contact a counsellor and let them know you will be sending your friend to them

Location	Who is present?	Planning
At your friend's house	Bring information on mental health supports to show your friend	Bring information on mental health supports to show your friend
In a private neutral setting (on a bench under a tree in the school grounds)	Contact a counsellor and let them know you will be sending your friend to them	Contact a counsellor and let them know you will be sending your friend to them
Waiting for the bus in the morning	Organise a teacher to have the conversation without you	Don't plan – it's better to be spontaneous.

While it's great to think about the best way to have a conversation with your friend, **don't worry if you can't make it happen like you planned. The important thing is to talk with your friend, and not put it off** because you can never find the right time or place.

Question:

What if your friend comes to you? How will that change the conversation you have with your friend?

Activity 6: Helpful ideas on having a conversation

- **Let your friend know that you are worried.** Use a calm voice, and avoid expressing judgement. Friends often worry about what their friends will think of them. If they feel like you are negatively judging them it may stop them from telling you what's going on and asking for help.
- **If you can, tell them exactly what is worrying you.**
For example:
"I'm worried about you. I have noticed that you're spending a lot of time alone, and you don't seem as happy as you usually do." Or "I'm worried about you. I've noticed that you seem to be feeling very sensitive and get offended easily."
- **Let them talk.** This is your friend's chance to open up to you. Be a good listener and give them the time they need to get their thoughts out.
- **Don't go on about your problems.** Talking about your problem will not help your friend and may make them feel you think their problems are not important.
- **Don't seek to brush off their problems.** Don't tell your friend their worries are nothing, and don't tell them to snap out of it.
- **Check out with them what you have heard.** Use active listening skills.
- **Don't think less of them because they are having difficulties.** Be non-judgemental and check your body language.
- **Stay calm if they are upset.** Your friend's feelings may have built up for some time and getting them out may be helpful.
- **Help them to get help.** Have some idea where your friend can go for further help, or go with them if they would like to see a teacher or a counsellor at the school. There are service providers and websites listed in this student handout.
- **Be patient with your friend.** Don't get upset or frustrated if they are unable to follow through on your suggestions.
- **Not everyone will respond well to offers of support.** Sometimes, your friend might feel hurt, upset or even offended. It is important to remember that you haven't done anything wrong by offering support.

Activity 7: Listening skills

Are you listening?

Let's face it – we are all listening all the time. We listen to our parents, our teachers, our classmates and our friends. With all the listening we do you'd think we'd all be experts. But as you have no doubt experienced in your life, some people are just better listeners than others.

What makes a good listener? Actually, it's quite simple and it comes down to a few, easy to apply strategies.

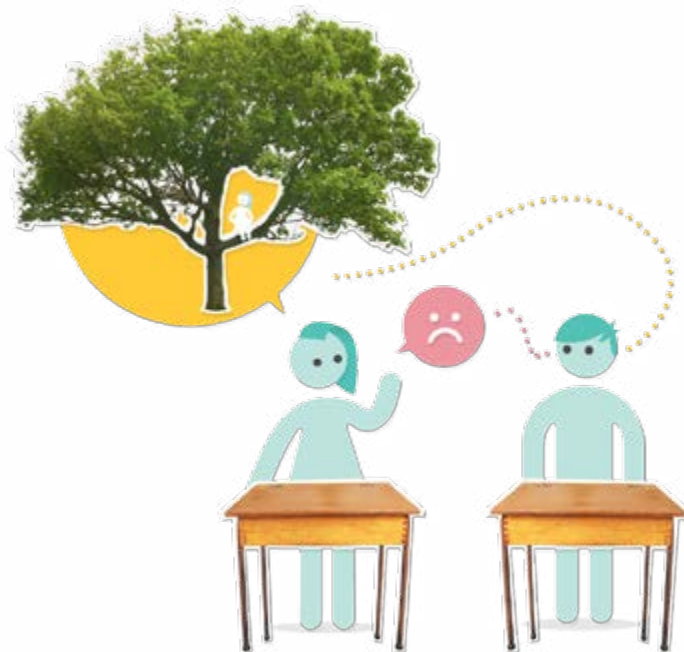
Watch as your teacher demonstrates the art of good listening.

Pay attention	Active listening	Stay neutral
<p>Show you are listening by using non-verbal cues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• nod your head in agreement• maintain eye contact• use appropriate facial expressions (e.g. smiles, frowns, grimace etc.)• sit up straight• lean towards speaker• don't cross your legs and arms	<p>Active listening is a way of showing you understand what is being said.</p> <p>Summarise key points in your own words at regular intervals e.g. "So what you are saying is..."</p> <p>Also try asking open ended questions (questions that start with how, what or why) to draw out more information.</p>	<p>Unless your friend specifically asks you, don't give your own opinions or advice during the conversation.</p> <p>This is their chance to speak and communicate their thoughts. Don't jeopardise that by telling them what they should think.</p>

Listening practice – optional activity

Do you think you can be a good listener by paying attention, listening actively and staying neutral?

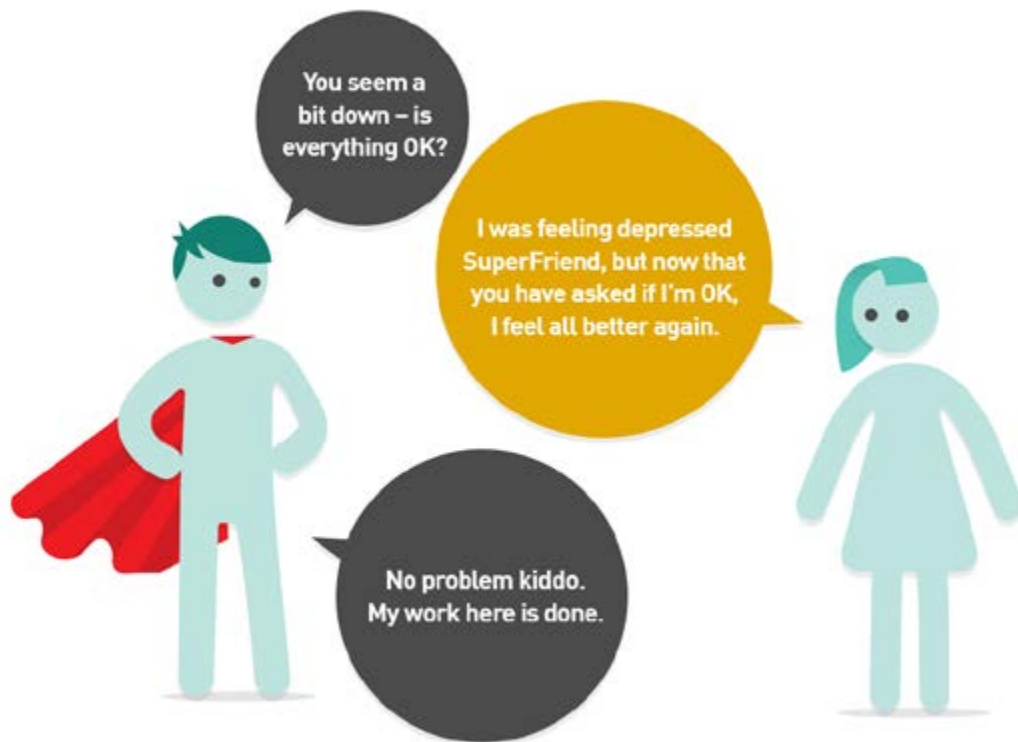
- Pick a topic from the list below and interview one of your group members on that topic.
- As you listen to their responses, try the listening tips from the table above.
- The third person in your group is there to take notes on your listening style.
- Run your interview for a minute or two, and then discuss how it went.
- Swap roles until you have all had a try at each role.



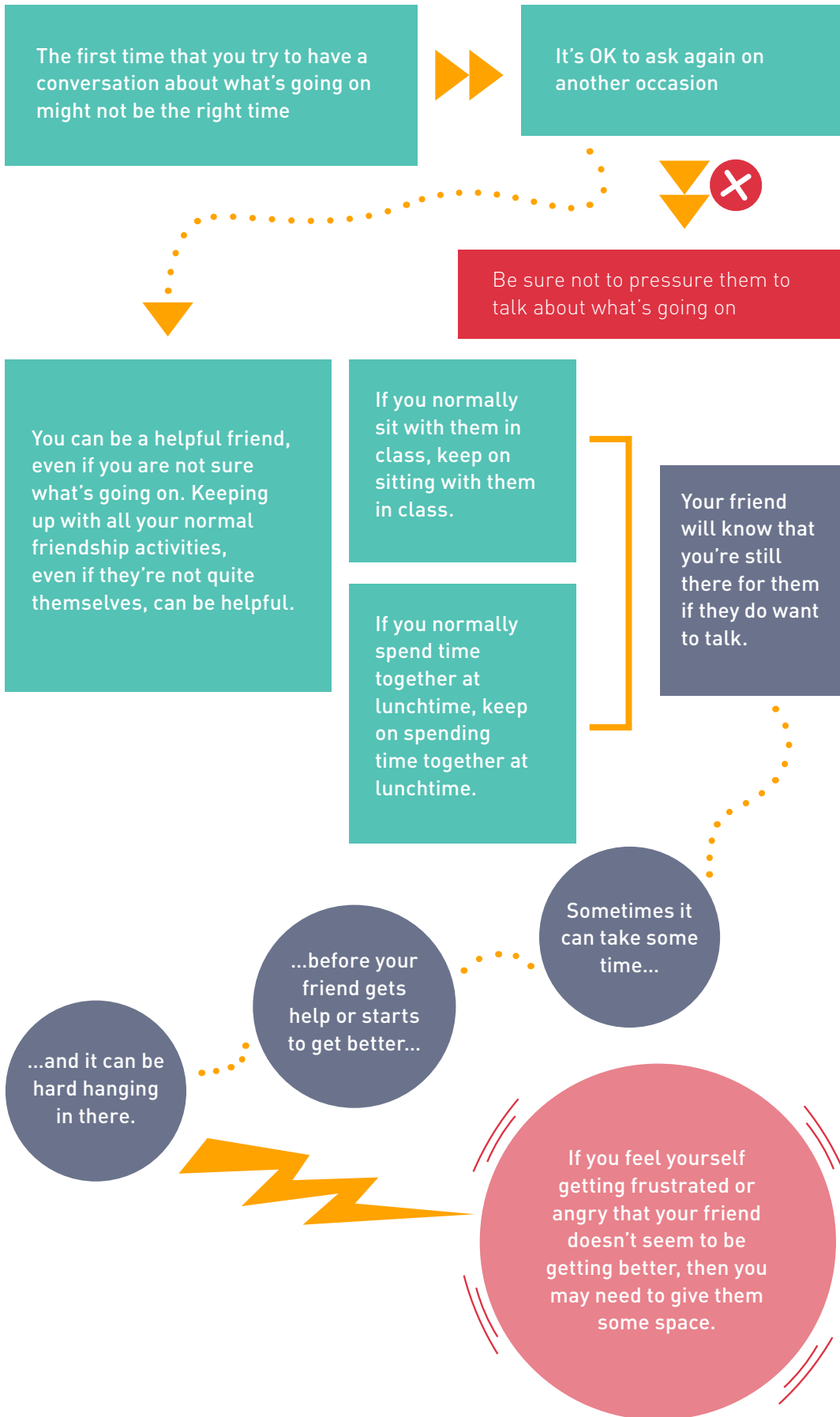
Discussion topics:

1. What food should be sold at school?
2. Mobile phones should not be used at school.
3. Should schools have a uniform?
4. Students should be encouraged to ride bicycles to school.
5. Sport is a necessary part of school life.

Activity 8: Following up



Wouldn't it be great if after having a conversation with your friend, they were suddenly all back to normal? Maybe it might work like that sometimes – especially if you are *SuperFriend*. But life is usually more complicated than that...



Activity 9: Tricky questions

You know your friend well, but that doesn't mean it is always going to be easy to know what to do. Sometimes things that seem straightforward turn out to be tricky, and vice versa.

Do the questions below have easy answers or are they true dilemmas? Discuss one of these in your group and prepare your ideas to present to the rest of the class.

Question:

What if you don't feel comfortable having a discussion with your friend? Is it OK to arrange someone else, like the school counsellor or a teacher to have that talk? How will your friend feel?

Question:

What if your friend tells you a secret that you think needs to be shared with a teacher, counsellor or other adult? If you tell, is it a breach of trust?

Question:

What if while talking to your friend you feel they should be talking with someone else, like a teacher or mental health professional? How do you tell them?

Activity 10: Looking after yourself

- Being a good friend means being good to yourself, too.
- It can be stressful to be worried about a friend, so keep an eye on how you are feeling.
- Asking for help from other people you care about can help reduce the pressure on you.
- Keeping up with the normal things that you do to stay happy and healthy is important.

What next?

Once you've finished these activities, you could think about:

- how you could use the ideas you have been discussing to help yourself or others negotiate the challenges of adolescence – maybe explain to a friend who is not in your class what you have been looking at in the activities
- suggestions for action your school might take – pass these on to your teacher or your school's MindMatters action team.

You could also:

- do your own research to find useful online resources such as websites, apps and forums. There are some sites and services listed in this handout.
- ask your teacher for information on adolescent development and understanding your friends and peers.

You may also like to consider attending this training course:

teen MHFA

This 3.5-hour day course teaches high school students in years 10 to 12 how to provide mental health first aid to their friends. The course was developed in response to research indicating that young people have a preference for sharing problems with peers. **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Australia** (<https://mhfa.com.au/cms/teen-mhfa-course-information>) is a national non-profit health promotion charity focused on training and research.

Sites and services

There is a lot of information available online about looking after your friends and seeking help. If you haven't already done so, explore the links listed below.

Looking after your friends

- Helping myself and others, ReachOut Australia
<http://au.reachout.com/tough-times/getting-help/helping-myself-and-others>
- Youthbeyondblue, *beyondblue*
www.youthbeyondblue.com
- Videos and Vlogs, *beyondblue*
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/understand-what's-going-on/videos-vlogs>
- What makes an ally? Ally Project
<http://www.allyproject.org>
- Want to help a friend?, headspace
<http://www.headspace.org.au/is-it-just-me/getting-help/helping-a-friend>

Seeking help

Check out these links for more information about seeking help:

- headspace
<http://www.headspace.org.au/>
- Orygen Youth Health
<https://orygen.org.au/>
- Kids Helpline
<http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/>
- Youthbeyondblue 1300 22 46 36
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/what-to-do-in-an-emergency/get-immediate-support>

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools developed by *beyondblue* with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health.

See more MindMatters resources at www.mindmatters.edu.au