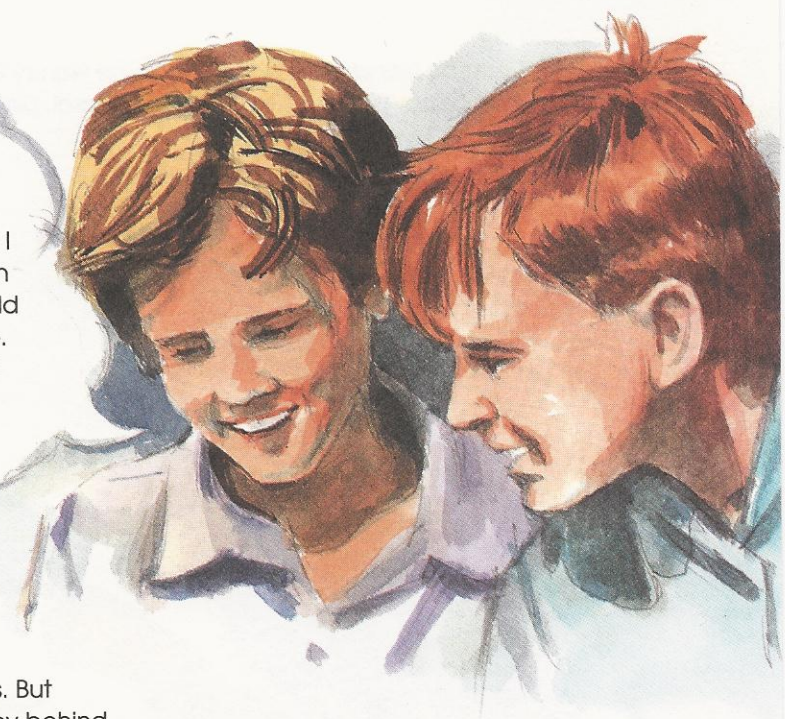
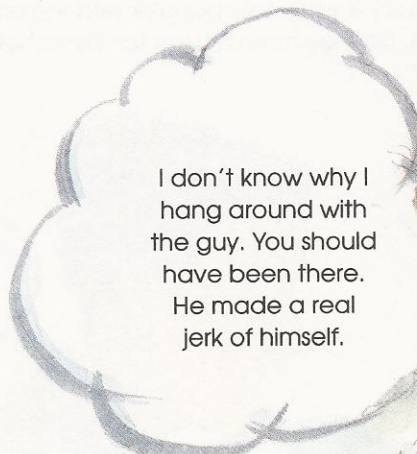


In some ways, each friendship is as unique as the people involved. Some friends share many interests in common; others share very few. In some cases, people with similar personalities are drawn toward each other. But it also happens that two people who are complete opposites are the closest of friends.

But there are certain characteristics that all good friendships have in common. From the list below, which qualities would you choose as absolutely essential for friendship?

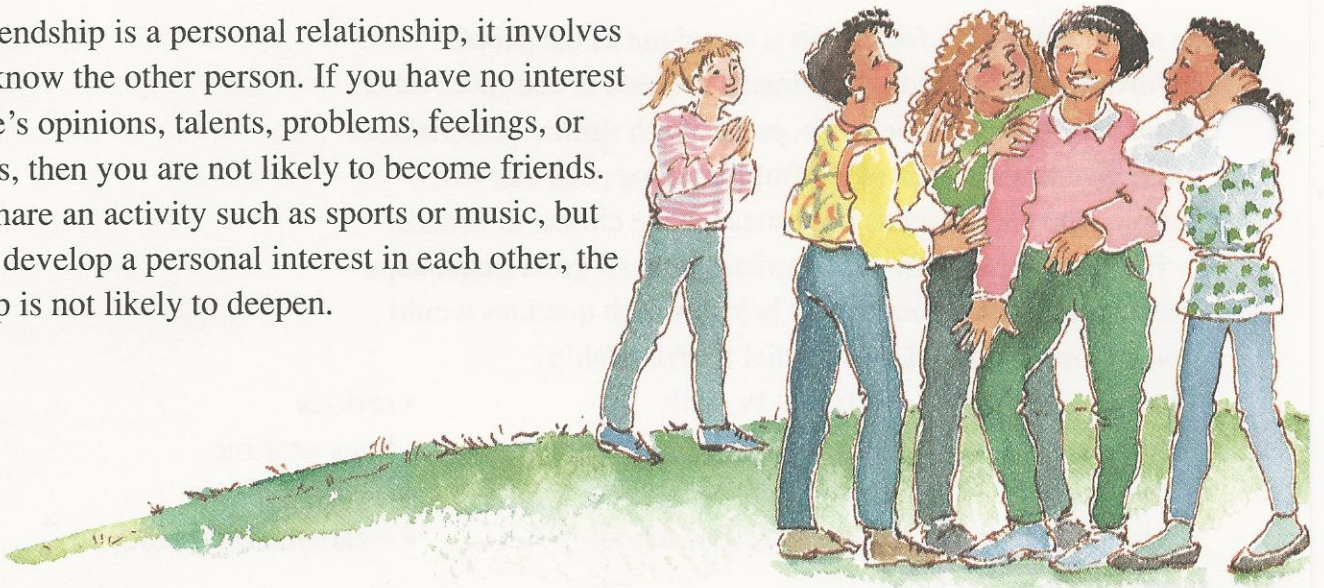
- loyal
- easy-going
- loves sports
- interested in me
- attractive
- fun to be with
- makes me feel accepted
- popular
- does well in school
- serious
- lives near me
- sophisticated
- wears the right clothes



Danny and Frank have been friends for a number of years. But whenever Frank gets the opportunity, he talks about Danny behind his back. Is this a real friendship?

Loyalty is an essential sign of friendship. You cannot share your feelings, thoughts, and experiences with someone you do not trust. Friends have the right to expect loyalty from each other. If they have a disagreement, they settle it themselves without complaining about each other to other people. It's important, however, not to confuse loyalty with possession. A friend is not disloyal because he or she spends time with another person. Friends have to be free to relate to many different people.

Since friendship is a personal relationship, it involves getting to know the other person. If you have no interest in someone's opinions, talents, problems, feelings, or experiences, then you are not likely to become friends. You may share an activity such as sports or music, but unless you develop a personal interest in each other, the relationship is not likely to deepen.



Carol would like to be friends with Nancy because Nancy is extremely popular with the other girls in the class. Nancy has never shown any interest in Carol. Do they have a basis for friendship?



Jack and Maria have been friends since they were in Grade 1. Lately, Maria is always criticising Jack's behaviour and opinions. What is likely to happen to their friendship? What would you do if you were Jack?

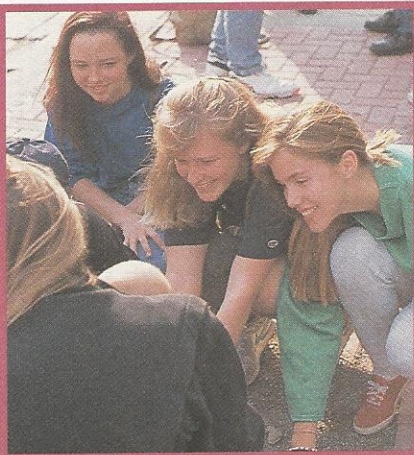
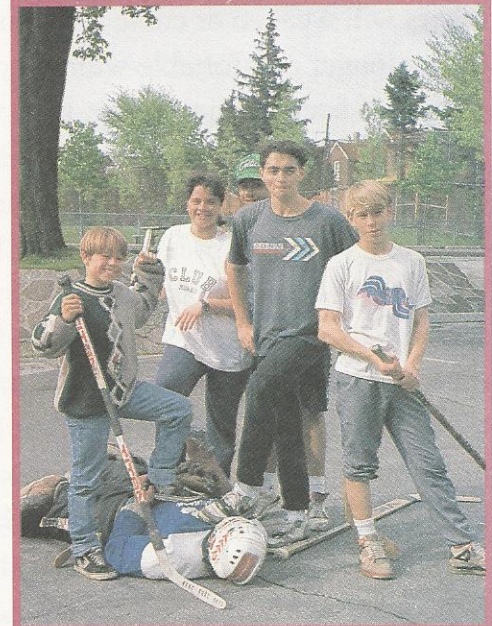
As people become friends, they come to accept and affirm each other. They admire certain qualities in each other, and are tolerant and forgiving of faults and weaknesses. They may have had an argument at home, or a problem with the teacher, but when they're together, things don't look so bad. Acceptance is necessary for friendship.

Without loyalty, personal interest, and acceptance, relationships that may seem like friendships can become exploitive. *Exploitation* means to use people for selfish reasons. One person wants to get something from another person instead of wanting to give something:

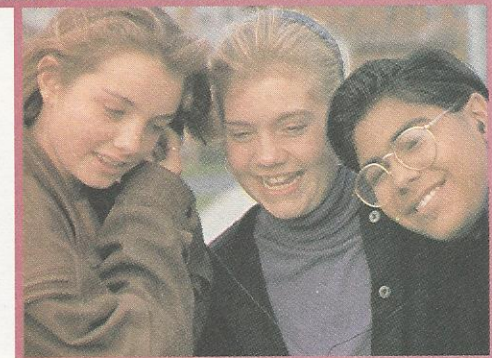
- An unpopular person wants to get status by having a relationship with someone who is popular.
- An aggressive person wants to get a feeling of power by having a relationship with someone who is weaker and dependent.

When this happens between people who are supposed to be friends, it harms both of them. Friendship is meant to bring out the best in people — unselfishness, generosity, wanting what is good for another person. Exploitation is really the opposite of friendship.

Sometimes people don't recognize that they are being exploited. Or perhaps they're comfortable with the situation and don't want to change. Or, they may feel trapped, but don't realize that they have the freedom to say no. Talking to another person — a parent, a teacher, or a trusted friend — about the situation can be helpful.



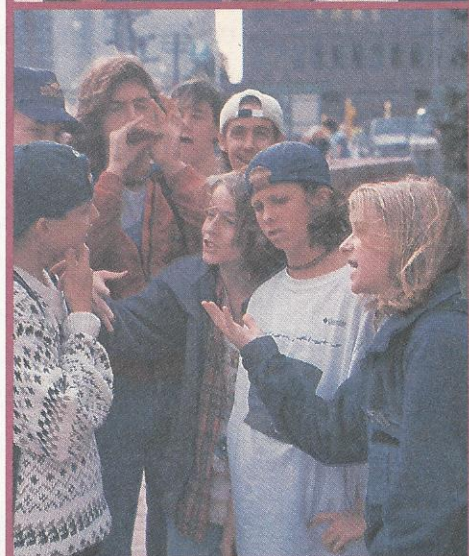
Not all friendships develop into close relationships. Usually people have one or two best friends with whom they can be intimate. As well, they are often part of a larger group of friends who give them a sense of belonging, but with whom their relationship is less intimate. The people in this group enjoy each other's company and often do things together.



Beyond this group, most people also have acquaintance-friends. These are people whom they see regularly, but do not really know very well. Acquaintance-friends might be in the same classroom, belong to the same sports team, or have a shared interest such as music. Best friends, group friends, and acquaintance-friends — each type of relationship is important.

As you develop and discover more about yourself, your relationships will change. New friendships will begin, and others will weaken or come to an end. You might find that you are no longer comfortable with the people in your larger group of friends because their interests or values differ from yours.

Changes in relationships are stressful and people's feelings do get hurt. It is hard to end a friendship, especially when one person does not want it to happen. Usually, however, friendships do not stop suddenly. Instead, people begin to spend less time with each other and gradually drift apart as other relationships become more important. It is also stressful to detach yourself from a group of friends, even if you have good reasons for doing so. You miss the sense of identity and belonging that the group provides. Stress, hurt feelings, worries about friendship — these are difficult, but normal experiences as people learn how to live the relationship of friendship.



Issues in Friendship

At this time in your life your relationships with people your own age are important to you. The experience of being with friends is an enjoyable and necessary part of your development. You learn to relate to many different people, you discover more about yourself, and you clarify your opinions and values as you communicate with your friends. With close friends you also have the opportunity to give and receive acceptance, affirmation, and loyalty. You discover the value of being a friend.

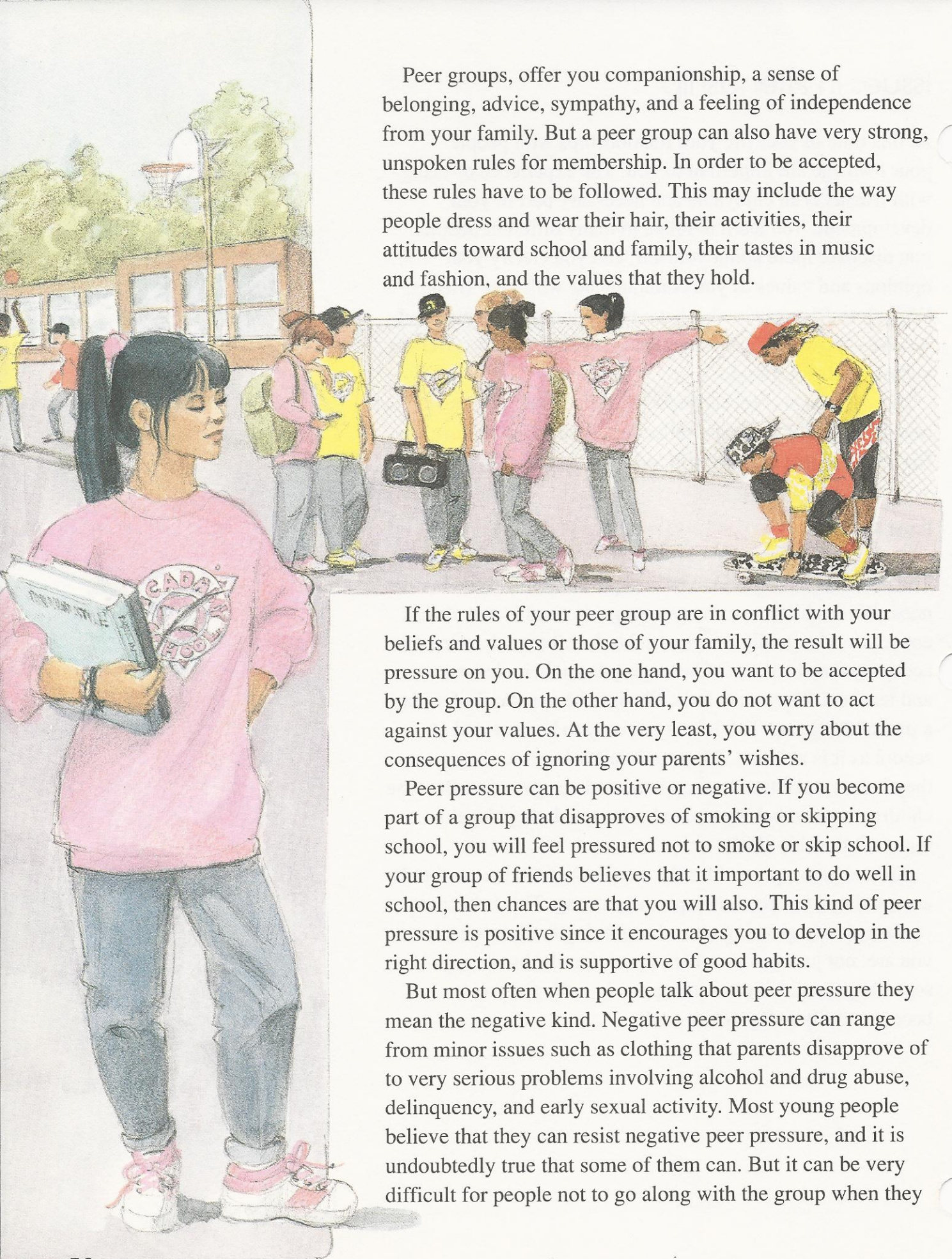
But an intense preoccupation with friendship also raises new issues that need some reflection. A sense of balance in friendship is just as important as it is in family life.

Peer Pressure

The desire to belong and to be accepted is an essential human need. When children are very young this need is met almost entirely by the family. Later, at school, children also look for acceptance and a sense of belonging from their classmates and teachers. They want to be liked, to be approved of, to be a part of the group. But it is not as easy to be accepted at school as it is at home. They can't talk whenever they want, they have to take turns, co-operate, and compromise. Because children want to belong and to be accepted, they develop these relationship skills.

Around your age, and for the next few years, the need to be accepted by your peers is especially strong. This is because you are slowly growing up and beginning to discover who you are, not just as a member of your family, but as a separate person. This has to happen in order for you to become a fully independent adult.

Peer groups, offer you companionship, a sense of belonging, advice, sympathy, and a feeling of independence from your family. But a peer group can also have very strong, unspoken rules for membership. In order to be accepted, these rules have to be followed. This may include the way people dress and wear their hair, their activities, their attitudes toward school and family, their tastes in music and fashion, and the values that they hold.



If the rules of your peer group are in conflict with your beliefs and values or those of your family, the result will be pressure on you. On the one hand, you want to be accepted by the group. On the other hand, you do not want to act against your values. At the very least, you worry about the consequences of ignoring your parents' wishes.

Peer pressure can be positive or negative. If you become part of a group that disapproves of smoking or skipping school, you will feel pressured not to smoke or skip school. If your group of friends believes that it important to do well in school, then chances are that you will also. This kind of peer pressure is positive since it encourages you to develop in the right direction, and is supportive of good habits.

But most often when people talk about peer pressure they mean the negative kind. Negative peer pressure can range from minor issues such as clothing that parents disapprove of to very serious problems involving alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency, and early sexual activity. Most young people believe that they can resist negative peer pressure, and it is undoubtedly true that some of them can. But it can be very difficult for people not to go along with the group when they

have a very strong need to belong and to be accepted. This is the main reason why parents worry so much about their children's choice of friends.

Understanding peer pressure will not eliminate it from your life, but it may help you develop ways of handling it. You have many roles in your life and being a friend is only one of them. It is an important role, but it has to be balanced with your other roles — member of a family, student, and developing individual.

Balancing Family and Friends

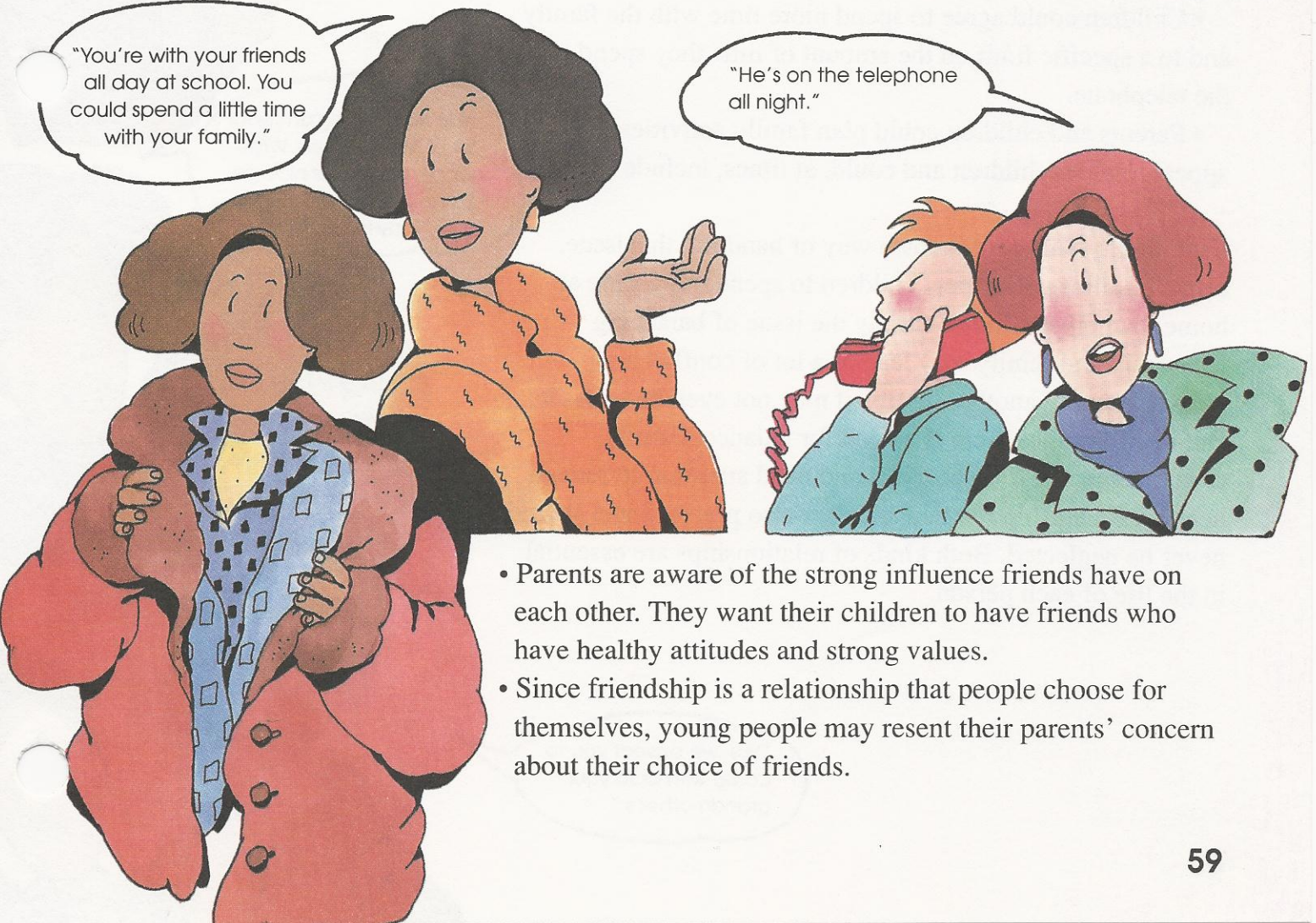
As children grow up, their friendships sometimes become an issue within families. This is a new tension that happens for several reasons:

- As young people spend more time with friends, they spend less time with their families. This big change for families creates some stress.



"You're with your friends all day at school. You could spend a little time with your family."

"He's on the telephone all night."



- Parents are aware of the strong influence friends have on each other. They want their children to have friends who have healthy attitudes and strong values.
- Since friendship is a relationship that people choose for themselves, young people may resent their parents' concern about their choice of friends.

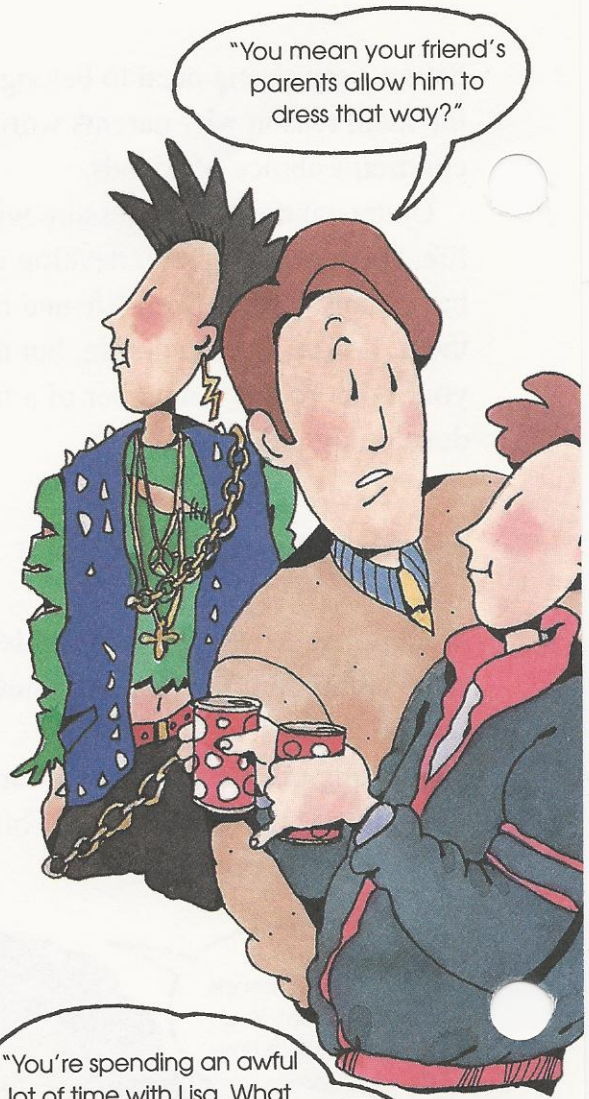
Because this issue is so important to parents and children, it can easily lead to conflict. This is another situation where communication rules are very important.

When friendship has become a family issue, it can be helpful for parents and children to have a discussion about it at a time when they are relaxed and getting along with each other. What is most important is that they listen to each other's point of view and communicate in an honest and respectful manner. When people aren't listening to each other, they often exaggerate and say things like, "You hate all my friends!" or "You never spend any time at home!" These kinds of messages are invitations to an argument, not a discussion.

There are many compromises that parents and children can work out, for example:

- Parents could agree to stop criticizing their children's friends. If they have a serious concern, however, they have the responsibility to communicate it honestly and respectfully.
- Children could agree to spend more time with the family and to a specific limit on the amount of time they spend on the telephone.
- Parents and children could plan family activities that appeal to older children and could, at times, include friends.

Each family will have its own way of handling this issue. Some families will expect children to spend more time at home than others. In one family the issue of balancing friendship and family may lead to a lot of conflict and unhappiness. In another family, it may not even be an issue. But in all families there is a need for balance. Family relationships are irreplaceable, and need attention to remain healthy. Friendship relationships are also precious and should never be neglected. Both kinds of relationships are essential in the life of each person.



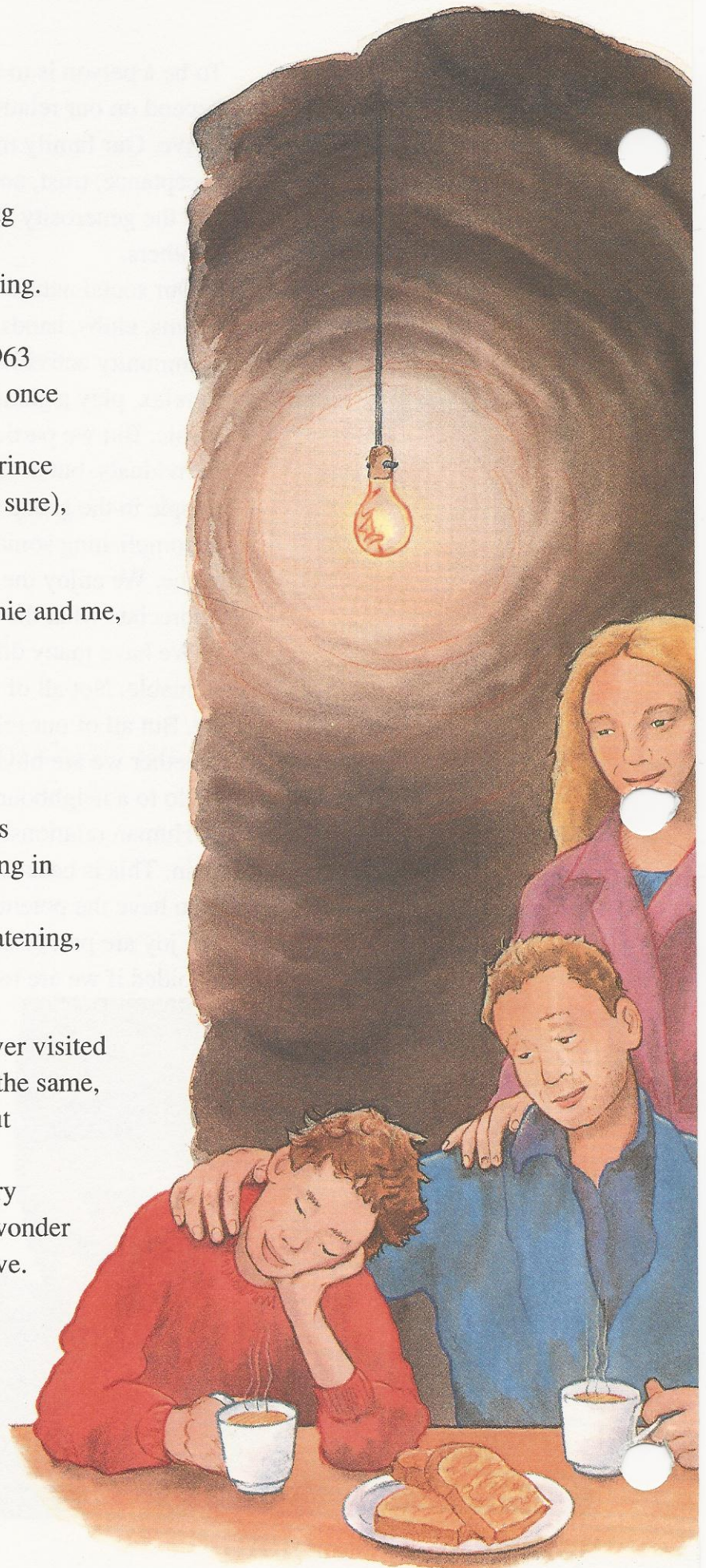
Great Things Have Happened

We were talking about the great things that have happened in our lifetimes; and I said, "Oh, I suppose the moon landing was the greatest thing that has happened in my time." But, of course, we were all lying. The truth is the moon landing didn't mean one-tenth as much to me as one night in 1963 when we lived in a three-room flat in what once had been the mansion of some Victorian merchant prince (our kitchen had been a clothes closet, I'm sure), on a street where by now nobody lived who could afford to live anywhere else. That night, the three of us, Claudine, Johnnie and me, woke up at half-past four in the morning and ate cinnamon toast together.

"Is that all?" I hear somebody ask.

Oh, but we were silly with sleepiness and, under our windows, the street-cleaners were working their machines and conversing in Italian, and everything was strange without being threatening, even the tea-kettle whistled differently than in the daytime: it was like the feeling you get sometimes in a country you've never visited before, when the bread doesn't taste quite the same, the butter is a small adventure, and they put paprika on the table instead of pepper, except that there was nobody in this country except the three of us, half-tipsy with the wonder of being alive, and wholly enveloped in love.

Alden Nowlan



To be a person is to live in relationship with others. We depend on our relationships; without them, we could not thrive. Our family members, who first offer us love, acceptance, trust, and forgiveness, give us the confidence and the generosity to offer the gift of friendship and intimacy to others.

Our social nature also draws us toward group activities. Teams, clubs, bands, choirs, after-school programs, community activities — these groups offer us the opportunity to relax, play a game, exercise, pursue an interest, or create music. But we participate in these activities not just as individuals, but as members of a group. We relate to the other people in the group in a special way. Together, we are accomplishing something that we could not accomplish alone. We enjoy the activity as an individual, but we also appreciate what the whole group accomplishes.

We have many different relationships, and each one is valuable. Not all of them are intimate, and this is as it should be. But all of our relationships can be friendly and respectful whether we are buying a candy bar from someone, saying hello to a neighbour, or sharing a seat on the school bus.

Human relationships always have the potential to cause pain. This is because they are so important to us. But they also have the potential to bring great joy. Both the pain and the joy are part of each person's experience. They cannot be avoided if we are to be fully human.

