

Exploring friendships and relationships

Humans by nature are social creatures. Relationships—and friendships especially—are an important part of our lives. Some of our relationships will be constant, while others will come and go, just like the seasons. As we grow, develop, and take on new opportunities, the nature of our relationships and friendships will change.

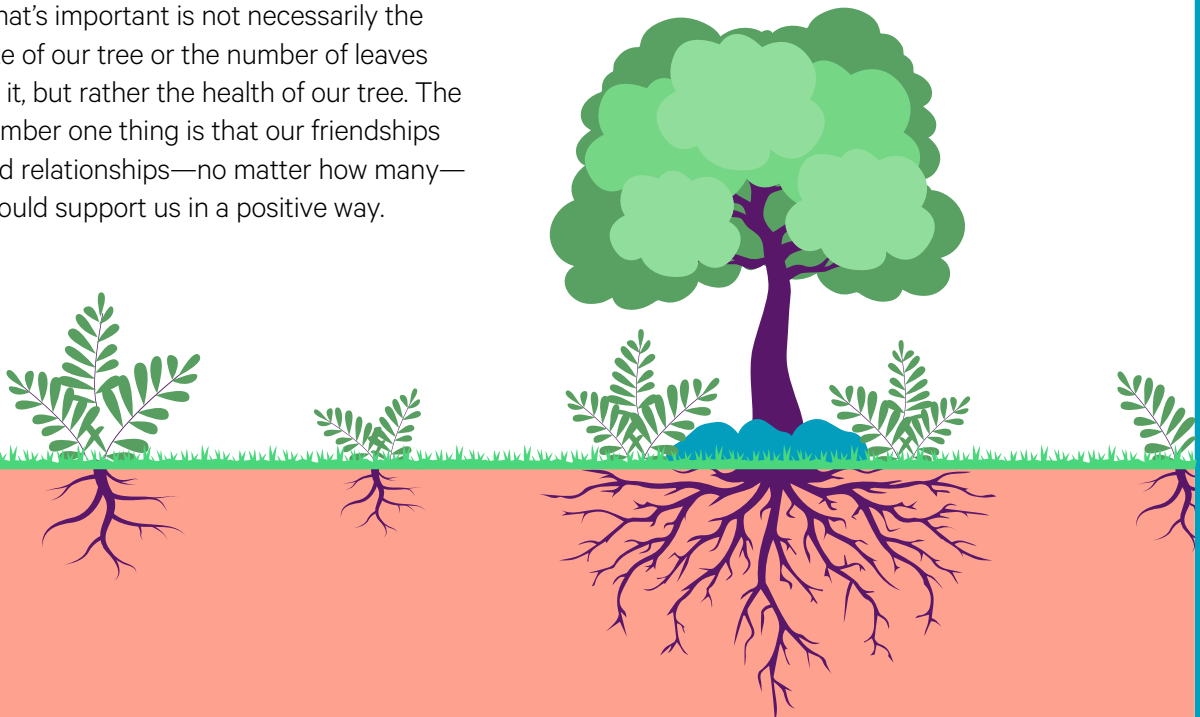
There can be times in our life when it feels like we're surrounded by a lot of friends, and other times when we feel more alone. It's completely normal for friendships and relationships to ebb and flow and change over time. But if you feel unsupported, or if this topic is bringing up feelings of loneliness or isolation, talk to a trusted person.

Relationships, and friendships especially, influence our health and wellbeing, so we've got to make sure they are healthy and supportive.

What shape is your tree?

It can help to visualise our friendships and relationships like a tree. People who are important to us over the long term, like family or long-term friends, form our trunk. People who become important as we grow, such as teammates or good friends, form our branches. They help us expand ourselves further. Then, we have leaves—people who might be in our lives for a short time. Some people begin as leaves but become our branches or even our trunk. But it's totally normal for some leaves—teachers, classmates, acquaintances—to come and go from season to season.

What's important is not necessarily the size of our tree or the number of leaves on it, but rather the health of our tree. The number one thing is that our friendships and relationships—no matter how many—should support us in a positive way.



Healthy relationships: setting and respecting boundaries

Strong friendships and relationships are great. They make us feel more comfortable and more confident. In any friendship and relationship, everyone involved needs to feel safe.

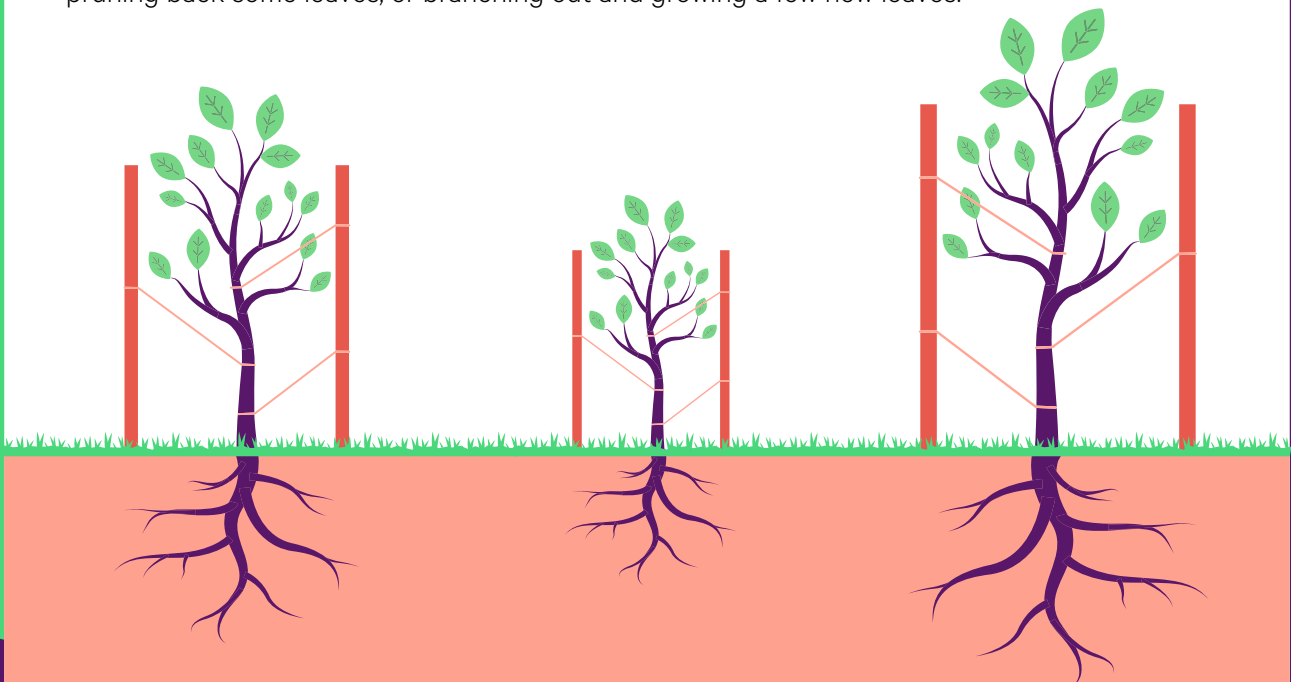
If someone isn't feeling good, for example, feelings like stress or anxiety are coming up, it's potentially because a boundary has been crossed.

Boundaries are more than just saying "no"—they dictate how we and others should interact to create a feeling of safety and comfort. They give us guidelines for how we interact together. They have to be mutually agreed upon and respected.

Depending on each relationship, we might set boundaries for a range of different things. For example, one boundary might be about how you communicate, like texting first before calling. Or you might have a boundary around physical space, like preferring high-fives to hugs.

Sometimes people won't know they've crossed a boundary until we tell them. While these conversations can be difficult, they're very important. Since boundaries are personal to you, try to use an "I" statement. You might start with something like, "I value our friendship and I want to make sure it's working for both of us". Then lay out a boundary, for example, "To be honest, I prefer it when people text first before calling", or, "I actually do high-fives, not hugs", or, "I just need some time to myself".

If someone continually doesn't respect our boundaries, even after we've reminded them, then it may be a sign of a relationship that isn't working for us. It might be the right season to consider pruning back some leaves, or branching out and growing a few new leaves.



TRY IT

- Take 5-10 minutes to sketch your tree to symbolise your friendships and relationships. What does your tree look like? Think about the relationships and friendships in your life.
- Which relationships and friendships are healthiest? Just like a tree, how can you best nurture and foster those relationships, so that they stay as healthy as possible?
- How about unhealthy leaves and branches—are there any friendships or relationships you have where there are boundaries you may need to set? How can you go about setting them? Try writing down your boundaries to help you prepare for any conversations you might need to have.

REFLECT

- After sketching your tree, ask yourself, are you happy with the shape of your tree?
- Did anything about your tree surprise you? Were some aspects bigger or smaller than you expected?
- Overall, do you feel like your tree is healthy? Are any areas unhealthy, that you may want to work on?

WANT MORE? CHECK THESE OUT!

Blog: How to deepen your relationships with mindful listening
<https://blog.smilingmind.com.au/how-to-deepen-your-relationships-with-mindful-listening>

Reach Out: What makes a good friend?
<https://au.reachout.com/articles/what-makes-a-good-friend>

Reach Out: How to tell a friend they've hurt you
<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-tell-your-friend-theyve-hurt-you>

CHECK OUT THE FEELING IT SERIES HERE!



Web app link:
<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/explore/youth/feeling-it-year-7-10>

Smiling Mind app location:
All programs > Youth > Feeling It, Year 7-10

WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

Immediate danger

If you're in a life-threatening situation and need immediate help call 000

Want to talk to someone?

Your school

- Reach out to a teacher or wellbeing coordinator at your school

During business hours

If you're having difficulty coping during business hours you can also contact:

- Headspace <https://headspace.org.au>
- A local GP to arrange an appointment with them that day

Available 24 hours every day

If you're in crisis or are having difficulty coping call one of the following services, both of which are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800