

Toxic friends: when friendship is no longer healthy


Teenagers sometimes call negative relationships “toxic friendships” and bad friends “frenemies”. Instead of making you feel good, toxic friendships and frenemies can lead to you having more negative feelings, about yourself or others. These relationships are often characterised by **subtle put-downs**, manipulation, exclusion and other **hurtful** behaviour. But what are toxic friends or frenemies like?

- **They take and you give.** If you notice that the balance between giving and receiving **leans** heavily to your side giving and rarely **focuses on** your needs, it's time to have a talk.
- **They do not support who you are.** When criticism and put-downs are a regular part of your conversations, this is not a friendship that is good for you. Sometimes **disguising** their words as **teasing**, humour or sarcasm, such friends may **aim** to **lower** your **status** in the relationship in order to elevate their own. This does even greater **harm** when it takes place in public. **Speak up** and tell them you want to be treated with respect.
- **They cannot be trusted with your secrets.** A few **trustworthy** friends can be an essential part of a healthy life. Most of us have several superficial friendships where we **share** only things that are common knowledge. Those who hear your secrets must be “**true blue**” and also trust you with *their* inner thoughts.
- **They bring out the worst in you.** Some friends are just not good enough to be what you need them to be, and may encourage you to **indulge in** what is not good for you, such as drinking or taking drugs.
- **They consistently disappoint you.** If friends set a date with you and without warning bring along another friend you do not know, it is a little **upsetting**, but you can **get over** it. If they cancel going with you to a great concert and go on a date instead, you might be able to **cope with** that. If they borrow money from you and then buy themselves expensive things without paying you back, you may need to stop lending money. If all of the above are occurring with some regularity, you may get tired of expecting your friend to treat you with respect.
- **They do not like or respect your partner or your family.** We **rely on** friends to help us see the other side of things and to listen to us when we need to complain about someone who is a challenge for us. If friends go further and dislike those we care about, that is where trouble begins. Friendships that begin to separate us from those we love may begin to **drain** energy from our life rather than enhance it. Good friends are one of the most precious things in life. They can provide a safe place for you to go to when you are struggling, give you advice when you need it and celebrate with you when you are happy. Look for true friends and treat them as you would want them to treat you.



1  Match the beginnings and endings to make complete sentences.

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| a. Frenemies are | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. if they rarely support you. |
| b. These relationships affect | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. you should leave them. |
| c. You should talk to your friend | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. bad friends, the worst. |
| d. A toxic friend may be sarcastic to you | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. your feelings about yourself and other people. |
| e. If a friend doesn't keep your secrets, | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. shows they don't respect you. |
| f. Good friends bring out the best in you; | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. those we love. |
| g. Being repeatedly disappointed by your friend | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. isolate us from our affections. |
| h. Good friends should respect | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. not good friends. |
| i. Friendship shouldn't | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. and try to be good to them, too. |
| j. You should look for good friends | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. to elevate their own status. |

2   Read Keith's letter and answer the questions below.

I have this friend who needs attention all the time and he's sucking the life out of me, but if I stop being his friend, he'll get depressed. I just don't know what to do.

This is not my only 'toxic' friend either, and I don't know what to do about any of them.

We're all supposed to be best friends but I can't really be friends with them because they are so self-centred and just don't stop putting me down. This friend has told everybody things I wanted to remain secret between the two of us and I do not trust him anymore...

What should I do? Have you got – or had – a toxic friend? What did you do? I just need some advice – anything would help!

I wish I had something stable in my life... like a person. I wish I had a stable relationship with a person.

I mean, music and books are great but I just wish that the people I love were more consistent. Or maybe it's not them but me?

- What is Keith's problem?
- What do the words "he's sucking the life out of me" mean?
- Why can't Keith leave his "friend"?
- What do Keith's friends have in common?
- Why doesn't Keith trust his friend?
- What does Keith want?
- What does Keith mean by "consistent"?
- What are Keith's hobbies?

to aim: *mirare, intendere*
 to cope with: *fronteggiare*
 to disguise: *mascherare*
 to drain: *rimuovere*
 to focus on: *concentrarsi*
 to get (got-got) over: *superare*
 to harm: *ferire*
 hurtful: *che ferisce*
 to indulge in: *abbandonarsi a*
 to lean: *appoggiarsi*
 to lower: *sminuire*
 put-down: *mortificazione*
 to rely on: *contare su*
 to share: *condividere*
 to speak (spoke-spoken) up: *dire la propria, farsi sentire*
 status: *posizione sociale*
 subtle: *sottile*
 to tease: *stuzzicare*
 true blue: *completamente leale*
 trustworthy: *affidabile, degno di fiducia*
 upsetting: *irritante*

