



# School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 31

## Being the best friend you can be

---

### Part 1 - Listening skills

As a counsellor I am often talking to people about friendships. I ask questions such as, "What values are important to you in a friend?" and "What kind of a friend do you hope to be?" or "What difference does it make for you when your friend supports you?" By asking these questions I am able to work with each student's individual hopes and needs around friendships. Yet, there are many repeated themes that are important when it comes to any friendship; such as listening, not sharing private information, kindness and helping out if a friend is hurt or unhappy. Sometimes it is easier to have expectations about our friends than it is to be the friend we would like to be. This is where the guidance of adults, whether it be a teacher, parent, coach, counsellor or whoever else, is key. It is important to have conversations with your son about being the best friend he can be.

Listening to a friend is incredibly valuable yet listening is not always taught as a skill. Often young people (and sometimes adults too!) are so excited in conversations that they end up talking over each other and sometimes taking over a conversation. One small thing, yet something that can make a powerful difference, is to talk to your son about the importance of listening. You can model this to your son at home by taking time to talk with him and actively listening to him; looking at him, being present with him and not being distracted by a device or another task. We are often time poor so this can be done whilst making dinner, folding the washing, walking the dog or similar as long as it is clear you are listening and giving your attention to your son. If you do get distracted (it will happen!) acknowledge this with your son and try again.

At the end of conversations asking your son, “Is there anything else you wished to share?” or “Is there anything else I could have asked you?” also makes sure you have modelled good listening.

If your son feels he is not being heard in his friendship group, creating a game or tool to help your son could be helpful. For example, creating a ‘listening tool’ (this could be a ball, a teddy, a pen - anything really!) so that when someone in the group has the ‘listening tool’ he can talk and others need to listen, making sure everyone has a turn with the tool. This could also be useful at home.

Closely connected to listening is respecting other people’s information. It can be exciting to share other people’s news because it is interesting or different, yet it is important for young people to learn that other people’s information belongs to them and should only be shared with good intentions and preferably with their friend’s permission and knowledge. This can be tricky in the era of social media where respect for the privacy of others’ information seems to have been diminished somewhat. A powerful way to engage with this with your son, other than role modelling it, is to talk with him about how he would feel if his private information was shared when he did not want it to be.

I encourage you to talk about listening and keeping things private with your son, or even to ask the questions mentioned at the start of this newsletter, so that you can guide your son as he develops the skills and experience to be a good friend.



## Jenelle Hooson

**Jenelle is a Registered Provisional Member with NZAC (New Zealand Association of Counsellors).**

If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son’s homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim  
[amos.pilgrim@medbury.school.nz](mailto:amos.pilgrim@medbury.school.nz).