



It's a bit like training a dog to know its walkies time whenever you fetch its lead. If you follow the same routine every night, your body will recognise that it's time to go to sleep.

Make your bedroom sleep ready

Chances are you use your bedroom for many things – like doing your homework, scrolling online, hanging out with friends and plotting the downfall of an annoying sibling! But it's also really important that your brain associates your bedroom with going to sleep. Before going to bed, aim for a room temperature of around 17 to 18 degrees Celsius if you can, shut the blinds or curtains and put any devices and homework away.



CHAPTER 5

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIPS

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION . . .

What's the most important relationship you have? Most people would probably say it's with their mum, dad, sibling or best friend. But actually the most important relationship of your life is the one you have with yourself. I didn't realise this when I was younger, and throughout my teenage years I was very self-critical and lacked self-belief. I constantly searched for my faults and doubted everything about myself from my appearance to my sporting and academic ability. I really wish I knew then what I know now and had focused on being more loving to myself.

That said, we are social creatures after all and our relationships with other people are really important and can take a lot of work. In this chapter I'm going to show you how to have the healthiest, best possible relationships with the people in your life, from your parents to your friends, and even your crushes!



Parents

No two families are identical and we all have different relationships with our parents. Some parents are still together, some are divorced and others are separated, and many people today are living in blended families, with step-parents and step-siblings.

As young kids we tend to think that our parents are perfect and right about everything, but once we start growing up, they can fall from that pedestal. As you've grown older your friends have probably started becoming more important to you, and you feel you have more in common with them than with your parents. It's totally normal for you to start wanting more independence during puberty. It's also totally normal to suddenly start finding certain people annoying. Don't forget, you're currently riding a hormonal rollercoaster and that can definitely affect the way you react to people.

You may feel like some of your friends have cooler parents than yours – and chances are, some of them will have parents who are stricter than yours too! It's all fine; no type of parent is better than the other. You might not be able to change your parents but remember, they do have your best interests at heart and they are on your side. They also might be a little hurt that you no longer have them on a pedestal and have started to find them annoying. I know it's hard but try to remember that parents are people too. If you've not been seeing eye to eye with your parents and you want to improve your relationship, try the following exercise.

Dr Zoe's Prescription



Three reasons

Write down three reasons why you should be allowed to do whatever it is you've been arguing about, for example having a sleepover at a friend's on a school night. Then put yourself in your parents' point of view and write down three reasons why they might not want you to. Then, when you're feeling calm, tell them why you understand their reasoning, but put forward the reasons you think you should be allowed to go. This will show them you're considering both sides of the argument and trying to find a resolution. They still might not agree but will appreciate you being mature about it and might be more relaxed next time you ask.

Divorce

There might be times when parents have to separate or split up because they can no longer live with each other. Sadly, sometimes things just don't work out, and it may not be anyone's fault.

Some divorces are handled well but for many families it can be a really challenging time. My parents divorced when I was five and it was really hard. While I always knew that they both loved me,

they didn't go about things in a mature way. There were lots of arguments and a court battle over custody and the house. My parents had a lot of bad feeling towards each other, which wasn't nice for me as a child. But when I look back, I can see that my parents were still really young when they got divorced, and I'm sure if they had the wisdom that I have now they wouldn't have behaved in that way.



If your parents are going through a break-up or divorce, here are some tips to help you feel better . . .

- The most important thing to remember is that it isn't your fault and things will improve with time – it can just take a little while to get used to and for things to settle
- If your parents' arguments are upsetting you, let them know and ask them if they can discuss things when you're not around
- Speaking to another trusted adult such as a teacher or school counsellor, or an older sibling about what's happening can really help

- Another great way to get things off your chest is to write about how you're feeling in a journal

Addiction

Another issue that can affect your relationship with your family is if they are suffering from an addiction. If your parent has a drink or drug problem, it can feel as if they love the thing they're addicted to more than they love you, which can be really painful. The important thing to remember is that addiction is an illness, so you mustn't take it personally.

My mum developed what could be described as 'problem drinking' when I was fourteen. Prior to that she just drank socially, although she always found it difficult to know when to stop.

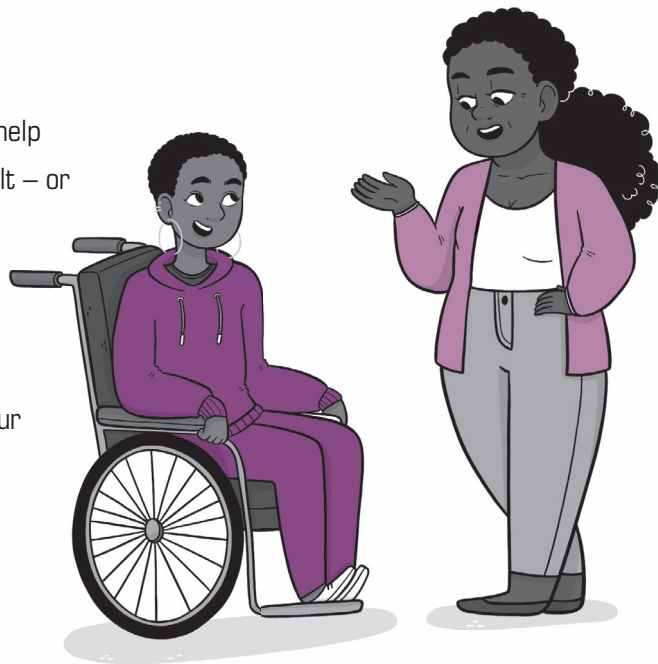
I moved out of home when I was seventeen because it was so difficult living with her drinking. I often used to feel as if she loved drinking more than she loved me. Once I even picked up her bottle of vodka and asked her which she would choose, alcohol or me. Now I know that addiction is an illness so this wasn't a fair question to ask her, but as a young person I didn't understand.

If your parent has a problem with drinking, here's some advice . . .

- Firstly, if you ever feel unsafe due to your parent's drinking, because it makes them violent or aggressive, it's really

important to seek help from a trusted adult – or contact Childline and ask their advice

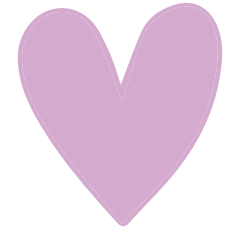
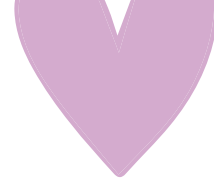
- Remember that your parent's drinking isn't your fault or responsibility
- If their drinking upsets you, try to avoid being around it
- Talk to another trusted adult or older sibling about how you're feeling – your feelings matter and it's so important that you're able to express them



Tips for living in a stressful family

It might not just be a parent's drinking or addiction that can cause stress; there are many things that can really take a toll on a family. We can't control our parents', carers' or siblings' behaviour but we can control how much we let it get to us. Hopefully these tips can help you deal with a stressful home life . . .

- Take exercise, like going for a walk or a run. It gets you out of the house and gives you a break, with the added bonus of releasing feel-good chemicals in your brain. Just make sure you tell your parents where you're going, and if it's dark, stay in your garden or try an indoor workout to get your blood pumping
- Keep reminding yourself that it's not personal and it's not your fault. Your parents don't hate you and even if you didn't exist, their issues would still be happening
- See or call a friend and talk about it with them. Sharing a problem can often help you feel a bit better about it. They might be experiencing something similar too
- Put your earbuds in and listen to calming music or a relaxation meditation (you can find loads for free on YouTube)
- Talk to your parents about how you're feeling when they're calm. It might be that they genuinely don't know the effect their behaviour is having on you. If it's easier, write this in a letter to them
- Journaling your feelings on paper can really help, especially if your thoughts are whirling round in your brain at night, preventing you from falling asleep



Friendships

Have you heard the saying ‘friends are the family you get to choose’? I love this saying because it sums up how important our friendships are. You might have already noticed certain changes in your friendships as you enter puberty. Some friends may have become closer and others might have drifted away. It’s all OK. As you grow up your interests can change and you find you have less in common with certain friends.

Let’s take a look at what makes a good friend and what to do when a friendship ends . . .

How to be a good friend

If you really care about someone then being a good friend will probably come automatically, but just in case you need a reminder, here are my ingredients for being a great friend . . .

- You’re able to put yourself in their shoes and understand them
- You’re a good listener
- You’re there for them when they need you
- You don’t avoid them if they’re going through something that feels a bit uncomfortable
- You can be trusted with their secrets
- You have their best interests at heart

- You enjoy making them feel happy
- You like doing things with them
- You appreciate your differences as well as your similarities

Finding your tribe

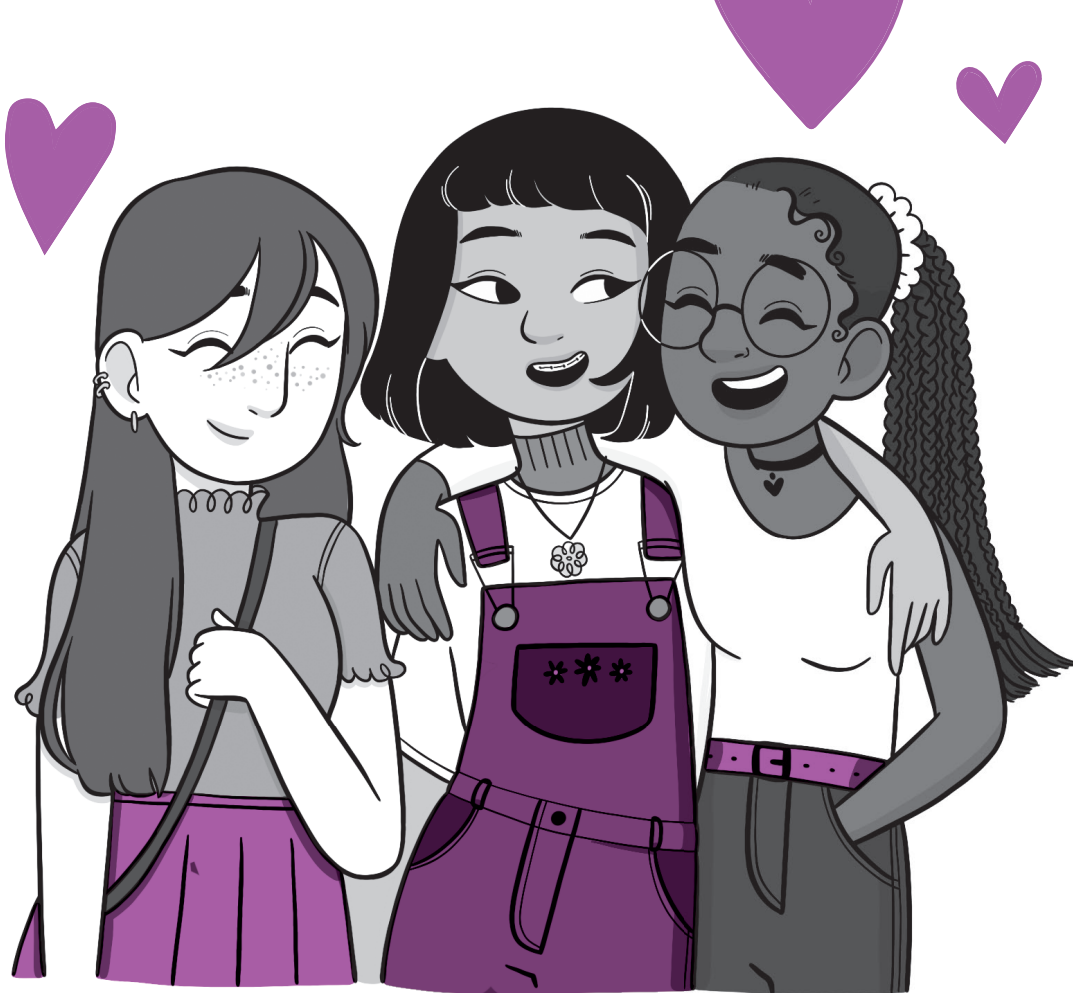
Finding your tribe means finding other people who are like you in some way. It’s so important to be true to yourself and not try to fit in with a certain group of people just because you think you should. Remember, you might not find your tribe right away, so don’t panic – it can take a bit of time. Sometimes friendships can even come out of the most unexpected places; you just need to be open-minded.

Peer pressure can feel like a *lot*, but if you’re feeling pressured into doing things you don’t want to with people you don’t want to hang out with, there are things you can do to get out of it . . .

- Practise saying no firmly
- Tell them your parents won’t let you
- Make up an excuse that you have to be somewhere else

When like-minded people come together, amazing things can happen and you can make friends for life. You might share an interest, like saving the environment, or a passion for a sport, art or other activity. Whatever it is, you’re much more likely to succeed and have a good time if you’re doing it with people who have the same goal as you.





The first tribe I belonged to was my rugby team and if I had to sum up in just one word how this tribe made me feel it would be 'safe'. Rugby brought us all together and because we were all different shapes and sizes, sexualities, ethnicities and from different social backgrounds, it broke down so many barriers. A couple of the girls were closer to the Queen than they were to me in terms of social status and I remember one of them telling me that I was her first ever black friend. But when we came together none of it mattered.

We were a team and we were all equally important and we all looked out for each other like a family.

Finding your tribe is like finding a family that you have chosen; a family that loves and accepts you just as you are, making you feel safe and supported.

Dr Zoe's Prescription



Take the first step

If you haven't found your tribe yet, please don't worry. It took me a while. Make a list of your interests and passions – such as sports, music, arts, books, political issues, other activities. Then ask your parent or caregiver to help you do a search to see if you can find any groups you could join – either online or in your area. Or join an after-school club. Don't be afraid to try something random. I know it can be nerve-racking taking that first step but being brave can really pay off, as finding your tribe can change everything for the better.




Friendship red flags

One minute you think you've met your soul sister, a true Best Friend Forever, but then you start getting a weird, uneasy feeling and what was a fun friendship becomes stressful. Sometimes friendships are not what they seem and some friends are fair-weather, not forever. But don't worry, I'm here to help you spot some of the red flags. If you find yourself with a friend like this it might be time to move on . . .

- They drop you when someone else comes along
- They make you feel bad and put you down
- They talk about you behind your back
- They always put their feelings first
- They put pressure on you and don't listen to you
- They're only there for you when things are going well

When a friendship ends

When I asked my question at the start of this chapter, I'm sure many of you will have thought that your most important relationships are with your friends. When things are going well, it can feel as if our friends are closer than our family. But sometimes friendships can change and even end, and that can be devastating. When a friendship ends, you can feel a real mixture of emotions, from anger to sadness and from jealousy to disappointment, which can all come at once and feel overwhelming.



Often, the end of a friendship can be our very first big break-up, so it can be hard to believe that you'll ever get over the feeling of heartbreak and rejection.

If you've experienced a friendship break-up, you have to remember that you can't control other people's actions but you *can* control your own reactions.

Focus on nurturing your relationship with yourself and always be kind and graceful. Don't try to get your own back – you'll only hurt yourself more.

There can also be the tendency to blame yourself, but it really isn't a reflection of you as a person. Unless of course you did do something to hurt the other person. If that's the case, then owning up to your part in it and apologising can make a huge positive difference. I know the thought of doing that might make you cringe, but trust me, you'll feel so much better about yourself and the situation if you find the courage to say sorry.

Sometimes friendships can end over a misunderstanding. If you think this has happened to you, it's well worth trying to talk about it to clear the air and see if you can salvage the friendship.

The first major friendship break-up I had really made me doubt myself and think that it must have been my fault, that there was

something wrong with me. I really let it get to me and knock my confidence.

It's OK to be upset and cry and show your feelings. Crying doesn't mean you're depressed, and you're allowed to feel sad. But if your sadness starts to feel overwhelming, try doing the following . . .

- Keep busy
- Do things that make you feel good
- Spend time with people who love you
- Re-read the chapter in this book on confidence
- Talk to a parent, carer or older sibling about how you're feeling

Being bullied

Bullying. That horrible word. Bullying is the worst. It can take many forms – it can be physical or name-calling or even online – and when it happens, it can feel like the most terrible thing in the world.

SIGNS THAT YOU ARE BEING BULLIED

- They hurt you physically or threaten to hurt you
- They call you names and repeatedly make fun of you
- They say negative things about you to other people or online
- They exclude you from a group of people
- They insult you based on your appearance, gender, ethnicity or disability
- You feel physically sick at the thought of having to see them



If you're being bullied, it's so important that you speak to an adult and ask for help. Tell a parent or teacher so something can be done about it. And remember to be kind and compassionate to yourself. The bullies want to try and pull you down and damage your self-confidence, so you need to do all you can to counteract that.

Being subjected to bullying is awful and understanding why someone is a bully isn't going to fix things, but there's usually a reason, like they themselves lack confidence, are feeling jealous of you or are having a difficult time at home. Their need to put others down is definitely a symptom that something's not right in their life and it's a cry for help. Talk to someone about how you're feeling, but try to remember that this is not your fault and the problem is with them, not you.

IF YOU ARE THE BULLY

If you've been bullying other people, you may already be starting to see why what you're doing is wrong. The important thing to realise is that you don't have to keep on being a bully; you can change.

If you need support and help to do this, don't be afraid to ask a trusted adult for it. It's not always easy to do, or to do immediately. The only way to heal the wounds of the person you've bullied is by saying sorry to them, and trust me, it will help you heal too.

Prejudice

Some forms of bullying are rooted in prejudice. We're all different and the things that make us different can be our strengths but can also pose some challenges.

It can be all too easy to become prejudiced against another person or group of people because they're different to you. People can be prejudiced against others because of things like their weight, age, religion, class, race and skin colour.

I was the only mixed-race girl in a predominantly white school, so I was always very aware of being different. When I was forming relationships, the fear that I might be judged for my difference was always at the back of my mind. My mum was white and she tried to protect my brother and me by telling us that any people who were mean to us were just jealous. When I look back now, I can see that she was preparing us for the racism we were bound to experience at some point.

Prejudice isn't always down to jealousy; it can be caused by ignorance and fear of the unknown too. Sometimes it's as obvious as calling someone a racist name, but other times it can be more subtle. These are called microaggressions, and they can take the form of jokes, casual remarks or loaded questions. They might not be as obvious but they can be just as hurtful.

We all have a responsibility to take action to eliminate racism and other forms of prejudice. It's about being brave enough to decide that you won't tolerate it. And this isn't just at school – it could be at home with your parents, siblings, cousins or other family members.

If someone says something that makes you feel uncomfortable, let them know. You don't have to get into an argument with them, you could just say something like: 'I didn't like it when you said that. It made me feel sad/uncomfortable.'

We all have the right to say out loud how something makes us feel. If you don't feel confident enough to speak out, at the very least you should ignore what they say and don't react or go along with it. Our differences shouldn't make us feel afraid or suspicious. If you can learn to embrace them, they could make for some really interesting and rich friendships. I have friends who are Hindu and celebrate Diwali. My nephew's mum is Muslim and celebrates Eid. The more different cultures you surround yourself with, the more chances you'll have to join in with their fun celebrations, *and* you'll have way more opportunities to eat cake – always a very good thing in my opinion!

Embrace diversity and let it enrich your life.

Dr Zoe's Prescription



Be curious

Is there someone in your school who's from a different background to you? Make the effort to get to know them better by asking them some genuine, heartfelt questions. They'll probably be really flattered that you asked and you could end up making a really interesting friend.

