

## Teen Talk – Friends & Relationships



***We all have different personalities: you may be a party person with lots of friends and good at chat or maybe you're a quiet sort of person who likes your own company or feels happier doing things with family than being out with your classmates.***

Making friends might be harder because of.....  
.....some of the things that have happened in your life

- Maybe you've spent a lot of time ill or in hospital
- Maybe you've spent a lot of time with adults and feel safer with them
- You may have gone to a special school or an accessible school at a distance from where you live
- Maybe your family have protected you so that you didn't get the same chances to try things out and take risks like your brothers and sisters
- If you're a wheelchair user you might not have been able to access the same places as your friends or, if your mobility is poor, you might not have been able to keep up with them out in the street or in the park. You might not be able to join in all the school activities that you'd like to
- You might have had a lot of people talk about the things you can't do rather than the things you can
- You might have had people talk about your body and poke and prod it until you feel it's not your own
- You may need someone to help you with personal care when you're out of your own home
- You may have a special needs assistant always at your shoulder when you're in school!

Some people with Hydrocephalus find it hard to imagine how their friends tick and feel a bit different. Having a disability might make you feel different, shy or withdrawn; or you might feel angry.

- Some young people say they feel they're neither "properly" disabled like wheelchair users nor able-bodied and are not sure they fit in anywhere.
- Maybe you feel self-conscious about how you look or about having difficulties with your bowel or bladder
- Maybe you feel people see your Spina Bifida or Hydrocephalus first instead of seeing the real you.
- You might feel you have all the same mixed-up feelings as most teenagers and then some extra ones to deal with

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### So how do I make friends?

- Be interested in other people and what they're doing. Good relationships are about caring and sharing
- Be a good listener as well as a good talker
- Find an activity you enjoy and can share with other people
- Think about your social skills. Do you throw a tantrum when things don't go your way, or turn sulky? Do you think the world should revolve around you?
- Think about how you present yourself. Do you choose your own clothes or do you let your mother do it? Do your brothers and sisters let her choose theirs? It can be hard finding things to fit if you have Spina Bifida and you might desperately want to wear fashionable shoes but not be able to... but lots of people with a disability do look trendy, have good haircuts and make up - or dress like their Goth or biker friends and horrify their parents.
- Make sure of your personal hygiene especially if you have difficulties with bladder or bowel management: this is a real problem for some people with Spina Bifida and is a great turn-off with your friends or in school or the workplace. If you're one of the people who won't catheterise when you should, wet the car seat or don't get changed when you're soiled, think what you're saying about yourself to the world.
- Find yourself some role models. We can't all be Tanni Grey-Thompson but you might be that girl down the road driving off to see her favourite bands all over the place or the lad with a fantastic sense of humour.