

When Someone Shows You Who They Are

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE WORTHY? How do you know if a potential friend is treating you well? What does treating you well look like?

People with ADHD often ask these questions, sometimes after looking back on a friendship that went south. The truth is, many people with ADHD are not treated well by friends or acquaintances. After unwinding a failed relationship, it's common to look back on what went wrong. It's also common to wonder, *How did I miss the signs?*

This naturally leads to questions about how to know in the future if someone is "worth" investing in as a potential friend. All this reflection is incredibly normal. We all want to see the red flags before we're too invested, and that's where the tricky part lies.

As a person with ADHD, I often rush into friendships. The cycle usually goes like this: I meet a new acquaintance and instantly feel we have something in common. Then, we jump in with both feet. I instantly give trust away without screening to see if the person is actually trustworthy. I'm usually so excited that it doesn't occur to me to pause and ask if I really even like the person. It has taken me years to learn to slow down to explore things like: How does this person treat me? Do I enjoy the friendship? Are there any potential red flags? Is this friendship worth pursuing?

Friendships have often been hard for those of us with ADHD. This is as true at age seven as it is at age thirty-seven. As we get older, the list of lost friends, broken friends and soured relationships grows. We have experienced rejection, false starts, cold shoulders, and ghosting. All of these memories are hard to just "overcome" and try again.

Because of this, sometimes, we overlook it when people treat us badly. The need for belonging and connection is so great, that even when someone treats us badly, we let it go.

This may be as true for your child as it has been in my life. Tolerating unkind, hurtful, or unfair behaviors from "the only friend we have" is a sacrifice many people with ADHD make.

But there is another way.

No one should have to sacrifice their own needs in order to have friends. Relationships are always co-created, no matter how old you are. So, it's important to explore a relationship from the perspective you gain by asking

whether it brings goodness and joy to your life. Otherwise, the friendship isn't likely to give you the benefits that only a true friend can.

Here are five ways to figure out if a friend is treating you well and their friendship is worth pursuing.

1 Clearly answer this question: What is your relationship?

There are many different kinds of friends and levels of closeness. As you evaluate a friend, ask yourself if that person is an acquaintance, activity buddy, trusted confidant, or lifelong pal. Let's define those for you.

- *Acquaintances* are people you're getting to know. You don't yet have an established routine or history together. There's a newness and you don't yet fully know this person.
- *Activity buddies* are people you see only at events. This could be a soccer friend, someone you volunteer with, or gym buddy.
- *A trusted confidant* is someone with whom you have history and learned/earned trust. You have likely known this person for many months, perhaps years, and you have experience with them holding your confidence, being a reliable friend, and someone with whom there is a give and take (you call them, they call you; you invite them out, they do the same for you).
- *A lifelong pal* is someone you knew very well at a time in your life. You may have lost touch because of circumstances (distance, obligations, etc.) but you know them well enough to feel like you can call them if you need support, and they feel the same about you.

2 Are there friendship red flags?

Red flags are signs that something is off or amiss with your relationship. They can include disrespecting your boundaries, continuing a behavior after you ask them to stop, insulting you, belittling you, or being mismatched with the give-and-take in your relationship.

3 Are you settling?

Check out your mindset about your friend. Are you settling for a not-so-great friendship because you think it's all you can have? Tolerating poor behavior is ultimately bad for your self-esteem. You do not have to tolerate be-

ing treated badly nor do you need to do anything to make or keep a friendship. You are worth more than that.

4 Is the friendship enjoyable to you?

One question that can help you determine this is: How do you feel after you are with them? If identifying your feelings is difficult, check the data: Do they keep your secrets, celebrate you, consider your needs, and consider your feelings? And the big one: are you having fun?

5 Decide and set criteria for how you want to be treated.

How do you want to feel after being with your friends? This will give you some insight into what you want your experience to be with your friends. Perhaps, for you, kindness matters—or maybe fairness is important.

Consider what you require to call someone a friend and then work backward for what that looks like practically. For example, if fairness is important, does your friend initiate phone calls, sharing about their life or asking you to do things?

THE TRUTH IS that people will reveal themselves over time. It is necessary to slow down the “jumping in” process if you want to develop confidence in yourself as someone who stands up for your own needs.

And, you never have to settle.

As hard as it can be at times to make good friends, you are worthy of a great friendship. Every one of us has something wonderful to offer in friendship. You have to learn how to trust yourself, so you start to feel confident when someone is showing you who they are (good or bad). Then, you can make the best decision about keeping or letting go of the relationship. **A**



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