

## HOW TO HANDLE TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

1. **Talk to the friend about the behavior that concerns you.** Be nice, but direct. For example you can say, “It bothers me when you (describe the behavior). Can we talk about that?” Your friend may be receptive to caring conversation. Don’t call names, attack the person, or say things like “you always...,” or “you never....”
2. **Set boundaries.** If your friend is doing something that really bothers you, tell them that you will walk away if they continue to do that behavior around you. For instance, if your friend constantly talks about another friend behind his/her back, you can say, “I like (friend’s name) and I can’t be with you when you’re saying bad things about him or her.”
3. **Talk to an adult you trust.** This may be necessary when a friend is doing something that could be harmful or dangerous – like using drugs, purposefully hurting themselves, or talking to strange adults on the Internet. An adult you trust may also be able to give you advice on handling certain uncomfortable situations.
4. **Find other activities to do.** Getting involved in an after school activity help you to find other friends who share your interests and can put distance between you and the toxic friend.
5. **Be considerate.** When other people ask you why you’re not spending as much time with that friend, don’t take this as an opportunity to trash him or her. Just explain that you’ve decided to take a break from each other for a while. Remember, you wouldn’t like it if someone said bad things about you (even – or maybe especially- if they were true).
6. **Remember that friendships change over time.** The people you really liked in kindergarten may not be the people you want to spend time with in middle school. This is normal. Don’t feel like you have to remain friends with people forever.
7. **End the friendship.** If you can’t work things out, you may need to end the relationship. Being with toxic people just pulls you down and causes you more stress.
8. **Stop sharing personal information with the friend.** This especially is the case if the friend is a gossip or can’t be trusted.
9. **Don’t be guilted into keeping the relationship.** Sometimes friends will say things like, “But you’re the only friend I have,” or will threaten to do something drastic if you don’t stay in the relationship. If they threaten something, tell an adult who can keep the friend safe.
10. **Find friends you can trust.** Look for people who have positive qualities (honesty, responsibility, trustworthiness, sense of fun, shared interests, emotionally healthy).