



Things to try

Secret Friend

This exercise is great for teachers to use with a class group or for a special event such as a residential trip or holiday. You can also use it as a parent with your child's friendship groups at home – such as at a birthday party.

The purpose of the game is to practise how to be more considerate to another child in an unobtrusive way – by being their 'secret friend'. The game enhances children's awareness of their own and others' feelings and can increase their sense of belonging to the group as a whole.

What to do

1. With younger children it may be helpful to introduce the activity with a discussion of how we treat our friends – how we show them kindness and concern; how we 'look out for them'. It will also be necessary with young children to be clear about what it means to keep a secret and to distinguish between 'bad secrets', of which we appropriately make children very wary, and good secrets like this one.

2. Put each child's name on a separate piece of paper and fold it up. Then put all the pieces of paper in a bowl or similar container. Each child in turn takes a name out of the bowl to identify their secret friend and opens it to make sure it is not his or her own name – if it is, another name must be chosen instead. Very young children may have to be helped to make sure they understand whose name they have chosen. And they must keep it a secret!

3. Now everyone in the group knows the name of child they must be a secret friend to. The idea is that the other child – the one receiving the friendship – should not necessarily know who it is who is looking out for them for the duration of the game.

4. The activity can last an hour, a day or even a number of days. At the end of the allotted time children can make a guess about who their secret friend has been. They can also talk about how they showed friendship and the positive ways in which their secret friend showed them care and friendship. These can be appreciated by the whole group. They might like to say whether or not playing this game has helped them feel more a part of the group.

The activity can be run again and again – in fact children will get better at it over time.

You can use this exercise with groups of adults too, to help raise awareness and understanding of group dynamics and loyalty.

