

# THE EFFECT

RELATIONSHIPS. RESILIENCE. REAL LIFE.



What's Your Friendship Style? Take the Quiz

**5** MYTHS ABOUT MAKING FRIENDS

**The First Friend**  
Why your earliest friendships shape everything

# Starting Well

**Ask The Effect**  
Real questions, honest answers

New schools. New people. New chapters. How to begin.

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# DEAR READER

## **Welcome to The Effect**

This magazine is for you. Not for your parents. Not for your teachers. For you.

It's about the stuff that lives in your head rent-free but never really gets talked about properly. Friendships. Social politics. The unspoken rules about who sits where and who gets left out. The way one comment in a group chat can rearrange your entire week.

If you're an adult reading this (a parent, a teacher, someone who works with young people), you're welcome here. But know that you're reading over their shoulder, not the other way around.

I started The Bully Effect to help schools and workplaces deal with things when they go wrong between people. That work continues. But this magazine exists because I kept noticing that the conversations that actually matter weren't happening in staff rooms or training sessions. They were happening in corridors, group chats, and the moments between lessons when someone was trying to work out if they belonged.



This first issue is about starting well. What does it actually feel like to be the new person? How do the first friendships you make shape everything that comes after? And what can any of us do, right now, today, to make someone else's start a little less lonely?

I hope something in here hits different. And if it does, send it to someone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alyssa'.

Editor-in-Chief, The Effect

# Nobody Tells You What the First Week Feels Like



There's a specific kind of loneliness that comes with being new somewhere. Not the crying-in-the-toilets kind. More like a low hum you carry around all day. You're in the room, but you're not in the conversation. You're at the table, but you're not at the table.


You know the feeling. Walking into a canteen where everyone already has their spot. Joining a group chat that's been running since Year 7. Sitting in a classroom where people are laughing at something you weren't there for. Pretending to check your phone because it's easier than standing there looking lost.

**I sat in the car for ten minutes before I went in. My mum thought I was on my phone. I was trying to remember how to breathe.**

— Maya, Year 12 student

We treat new beginnings like they should be exciting. Sometimes they are. But more often they're just uncomfortable in ways nobody prepares you for. Faking confidence when you have zero. Running constant calculations in your head: where do I sit, who do I talk to, when do I laugh, how much of myself is it safe to show?

This issue is about that space. The gap between showing up and actually belonging. The things that turn a stranger into a friend, and the things that keep someone on the outside looking in.



***Starting well isn't about getting everything right. It's about paying attention.***



# The First Friend

*Why your earliest friendships in a new place shape everything that follows.*

## Why your earliest friendships in a new place shape everything that follows.

Think about the first person who made you feel like you belonged somewhere new. Not your oldest friend. The one who showed up when you had nobody.

Maybe they sat next to you on day one and said something that made you laugh. Maybe they messaged you that night: “that teacher’s always like that, don’t stress.” Maybe they just said “you can sit with us” before you had to stand there figuring it out alone.



It probably didn't feel like a big deal at the time. First friendships almost never do. They happen in the in-between: a shared look during an awkward assembly, a DM at the right moment, someone lending you a charger without making it weird.

But those small moments? They have a massive effect on what happens next.

### The first person who makes you feel welcome doesn't just become your friend. They become your map.

Here's something psychologists have known for a while: the times when you're starting something new (new school, new area, new friend group) are the times when you're most socially vulnerable. Your need for connection goes up at exactly the moment when you know the fewest people. You show up with no contacts, no routines, no idea how anything works.

**“When I changed schools, I pretended I didn't care. I cared so much I felt sick.”**

— Year 9 student

And the worst part? Everyone expects you to just handle it. “You’ll make friends in no time.” “Just be yourself.” “It’ll be fine.” As if it’s that simple. And when it’s not simple, most people assume the problem is them.

it's not.



## How Friendships Actually Form

Most people think we pick our friends based on shared interests or similar vibes. Eventually, that's partly true. But in the first days at a new place, it's way more random than that.

Researchers studying university students found that the biggest predictor of who became friends was literally who lived closest together. Not personality. Not taste in music. Not background. Just proximity. Whoever was physically near you.

Think about what that means. The person you get seated next to on day one? They have a huge influence on your whole experience there. The group that happens to be standing near you when you walk in. The person whose locker is next to yours. These aren't meant-to-be friendships. They're accidents of geography. And they matter way more than people realise.

## What First Friends Actually Do

If you've ever been someone's first friend, you probably didn't think much of it. A conversation. An invite. Making room for someone who was standing on the edge of things.

But here's what those moments actually do: they break the pattern. Most people in established groups don't actively shut newcomers out. They just don't think to bring them in. Nobody's being mean. They're just focused on the people they already know. It takes someone actually choosing to include a new person to change that.

And it doesn't take much. Research shows that one positive interaction on day one can change someone's whole trajectory. One person saying "sit with us" rewrites the story from "I don't belong here" to "maybe I do."

**One "sit with us" can change everything.**

## When It Goes Wrong

Here's the less comfortable part. When you're new and desperate to fit in, you're more likely to accept a friendship that comes with strings attached. You can sit with us, but only if you do what we say. You can be part of this, but you have to drop that other person. You're in, but only as long as you're useful.

**"She was the first person who talked to me, so I let her decide everything. It took me a year to realise that wasn't friendship."**

— Year 9 student

This is one of the reasons starting somewhere new is a high-risk time for bullying. It's not that new places create bullies. It's that they create vulnerability. And when nobody's paying attention to that vulnerability, it gives the wrong people an opening.

## **The Other Side**

If you're new somewhere right now: it's supposed to feel hard. That doesn't mean something's wrong with you. Give yourself the same patience you'd give a friend in the same situation.

If you're not new, look around. Is there someone on the edges? Someone eating alone, pretending to be busy on their phone, acting like they're fine when they're clearly not?

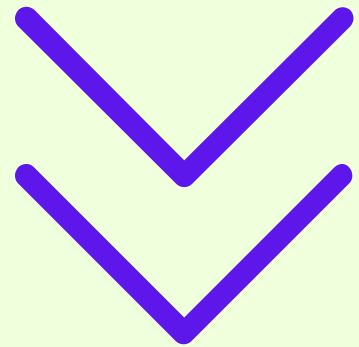
You could be the first friend they haven't found yet. And honestly? It'll cost you about thirty seconds.

But for them, it could change everything.



## Myth vs. Fact

# Five Things You Probably Believe About Making Friends



**✗ MYTH: Popular kids have more friends.**

**✓ FACT:** Popularity and real friendship are completely different things. The most “popular” people often have big social networks but very few close, genuine friendships. Having a lot of followers isn’t the same as having people you can actually call at 2 am. Some of the happiest people socially have two or three real ones and couldn’t care less about being known.

**✗ MYTH: If you’re shy, you’ll struggle to make friends.**

**✓ FACT:** Shy and bad at friendships are not the same thing. Plenty of shy people have deep, lasting friendships. They just tend to build them more slowly and in smaller groups. The idea that loud, outgoing people automatically have better social lives is one of the most persistent and most wrong beliefs out there.

**✗ MYTH: Online friends aren’t real friends.**

**✓ FACT:** If someone’s there for you, makes you feel seen, and you trust each other, that’s a real friendship. Full stop. It doesn’t matter whether it happens over FaceTime or face to face.

This is especially true if your in-person environment doesn’t feel safe or welcoming. For a lot of people, their online friends are the realest thing they’ve got.

**✗ MYTH: Boys don’t care about friendship drama.**

**✓ FACT:** They absolutely do. They just don’t talk about it the same way. Studies consistently show that when friendships break down, boys feel it just as much. But because everyone tells them it’s “a girls’ thing,” they deal with it alone. Which usually makes it worse.

**✗ MYTH: You should be friends with everyone.**

**✓ FACT:** You should be kind to everyone. That’s not the same thing. Keeping friendships going with people who drain you, don’t respect you, or only want you around when it suits them isn’t being a good person. It’s losing yourself. Knowing who not to invest in matters just as much as knowing who to invest in.

## YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED HONESTLY

**“I moved schools in October and it’s been five months. Everyone already has their groups and I can’t get in. I sit with people at lunch but I’m not really part of anything. I don’t think anyone would notice if I just stopped showing up. I’m not being bullied. I’m just invisible. What do I do?”**

— *Invisible*, 14

OK, first: you’re not failing. Moving schools mid-year is genuinely one of the hardest social things you can do. Everyone else has had years to build their friendships and you’ve had five months. The fact that you’re sitting with people at all means you’re doing better than you think.

What’s probably happening is you’re stuck in the “friendly but not close” zone. You know it: you chat, you’re nice to each other, but nobody’s actually choosing you. That’s a normal stage of friendship. It’s just one that most people skip because they’ve known each other since primary school.

The way through it is usually one thing: a shared experience that isn’t just sitting in the same room. Join a club, a team, a rehearsal. Help someone with something specific. Be the one who suggests doing something outside of school. That’s how “person I sit near” becomes “actual friend.”

You don’t need to crack the whole social code. You need one person. Start there.

And one more thing: the invisible feeling? It doesn’t disappear in one big moment. It fades so slowly you barely notice. Then one day someone saves you a seat without you asking, and you realise it already happened.

## ASK THE EFFECT

# YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED HONESTLY

**“My best friend started hanging out with a new group and now she’s like a different person around them. She’s not mean to me, but I can feel myself being phased out. Should I say something or just let it happen?”**

— *Fading Out*, 16

This one’s rough. And it’s rough precisely because there’s nobody to be angry at. She hasn’t done anything “wrong.” She’s just changing. And you’re watching it happen in real time, which is its own kind of horrible.

Here’s the honest truth: people grow at different speeds and in different directions. That doesn’t mean your friendship was fake, or that you did something to cause this. But it does mean you get to choose what you do next.

Option one: tell her. Not “you’ve changed” (that sounds like an accusation). More like: “I feel like we’re drifting and I miss how things were. Is that just me?” It takes guts, and she might confirm exactly what you’re afraid of. But at least you’ll know.

Option two: start building elsewhere. Not as revenge. Not to replace her. But because you deserve friendships where you’re not constantly wondering if you’re still wanted. Sometimes the bravest thing isn’t holding on. It’s letting the distance exist and putting your energy into something new.

Fewer than  
**1 in 2**  
bullied students tell  
an adult at school.

That's not a guess. According to the most recent US data, only 44% of students aged 12 to 18 who were bullied actually told an adult at school. More than half said nothing.

The reasons won't surprise you: fear it'll get worse, belief that adults won't actually do anything useful, and the most common one of all: "It's not that bad." Except it is. And the fact that most people don't report it means the adults in charge are making decisions based on incomplete information. They think things are fine because nobody's complaining. That doesn't mean things are fine.

If this was you, or someone you know, you're not alone. And the question that matters isn't "why didn't you say something?" It's "what would make it feel safe enough to?"

WHAT  
WOULD  
YOU DO?



# The Group Chat

Your year has a main group chat. Nothing official. It's just where plans get made, homework gets discussed, memes get shared, and gossip happens.

Three weeks ago, Sam joined your school. Nobody's added them to the chat. Nobody's even brought it up. On Monday, everyone's talking about a video someone posted over the weekend, and Sam's just standing there, smiling along, clearly lost. At lunch, someone mentions plans for Friday that were organised in the chat the night before, and you watch Sam pretend they already knew. Yesterday Sam asked you, casually, "Is there like a group chat or something?" and you changed the subject.

### What do you do?

**A. Add Sam yourself.** It's a group chat, not a VIP list. If nobody else is going to do it, you will. Sam will figure out the vibe.

**B. Ask the group first.** You don't want to just add someone without checking. Your message: "Should we add Sam?" and see what people say.

**C. Stay out of it.** You didn't make the chat. You're not the social chair. If Sam wants to be added, they can ask someone.



### So... What's the Right Call?

Honestly, there isn't a perfect one. Option A is the kindest, but if the group reacts badly, you've made things awkward for both of you. Option B sounds fair, but think about it: "Should we add Sam?" is basically holding a vote on whether someone gets included. If even one person says no, you've turned a silent exclusion into an official one. That's worse. Option C is the easy one. But it relies on someone else stepping up. And usually? Nobody does.

Here's the thing about group chats: they're one of the main ways people get left out now, and almost none of it is on purpose. Nobody sat down and decided to exclude the new person. They just didn't think to include them. The result's the same.

If you're going to do something, the cleanest move is probably this: message the new person directly, ask if they want to be added, then add them. No public vote. No drama. Fifteen seconds of your time. Done.

# On The Radar

A quote, a read, and something to listen to.



## The Quote

*“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.”*

— Anaïs Nin

Think about that next time you assume the new kid is being standoffish, or that your friend’s ignoring you on purpose. The way you read someone else’s behaviour says as much about what’s going on in your head as it does about them.



## The Read

### **New Kid** by Jerry Craft

A graphic novel about a seventh grader navigating identity, belonging, and the unwritten social rules at a new school. Won the Newbery Medal. You’ll finish it in an hour. You’ll be thinking about it for way longer.



## The Listen

### **Hidden Brain: “The Lonely”**

This episode gets into the psychology of feeling alone in a crowded room. Not loneliness like you’re on a desert island, but that low-level feeling of not really being connected to anyone around you. It explains why it’s so hard to break the cycle once you’re in it. All podcast apps.



# What's Your Friendship Style?

Be honest. No wrong answers.

## 1. A new person joins your class. You:

- A. Go up and introduce yourself. Why not?
- B. Watch them for a few days first. See what they're about.
- C. Introduce them to the people you think they'd get along with.
- D. Find a chance to have a proper one-on-one chat.

## 2. Your closest friend is upset but won't tell you why. You:

- A. Ask them straight up. "What's going on? Talk to me."
- B. Give them space. They'll come to you when they're ready.
- C. Check in with your mutuals to see if they know anything.
- D. Just be there. Sit with them. Say nothing. Let them know you're not going anywhere.

## 3. You're at a gathering where you barely know anyone. You:

- A. Work the room. You'll have talked to everyone by the end.
- B. Find one person you click with and stick with them all night.
- C. Become the connector. Start introducing people to each other.
- D. Find the most chill spot and have a real conversation with whoever ends up there.

**4. A friend does something that hurts you.**

**You:**

- A. Tell them right away. You don't sit on things.
- B. Wait. See if it happens again before bringing it up.
- C. Talk to someone else first to get their take.
- D. Think about it properly, then bring it up when you can actually have the conversation.

**5. The best thing a friend can be is:**

- A. Fun. Life's too short for boring friendships.
- B. Reliable. Show up when it matters.
- C. Connected. Friends who bring people together make everything better.
- D. Honest. Real friendship means being able to say the hard stuff.



## Results



**Mostly A's — The Initiator.**

You're the one who starts things. Plans, conversations, friendships. People are drawn to your energy. Your challenge? Not everyone moves at your speed, and sometimes someone's silence doesn't mean something's wrong.



**Mostly B's — The Loyalist.**

You're steady. Patient. The one people come to when it really matters. Your friendships take time to build but they last. Your challenge? Sometimes your chill gets read as not caring. The people who need you might need you to go first.



**Mostly C's — The Connector.**

You see how people fit together and you make it happen. Half your friends know each other because of you. Your challenge? Make sure you're investing in your own friendships, not just managing everyone else's.



**Mostly D's — The Deep-Diver.**

You'd rather have three real friends than thirty surface-level ones. Small talk drains you. Real conversation fuels you. Your challenge? Stay open to connections that start light. Not every important friendship is deep from day one.



# Five Things You Can Do Today

None of these take more than thirty seconds.

## 01. Learn someone's name and use it.

Not "mate." Not "bruv." Not "hey." Their name. It's the simplest way to tell someone: I see you and you're worth remembering.

## 02. Ask a question you don't know the answer to.

Not a polite one. A real one. "What was that like?" "How did you work that out?" People can tell the difference between interest and small talk.

## 03. Say "that took guts" when someone speaks up.

In class, in a group chat, wherever. When someone says the thing nobody else would, tell them you noticed. Most people who take a social risk never hear that.

## 04. Sit somewhere different.

At lunch, in class, at break. Break your own routine on purpose. You might end up next to someone you've never spoken to. That's the whole point.

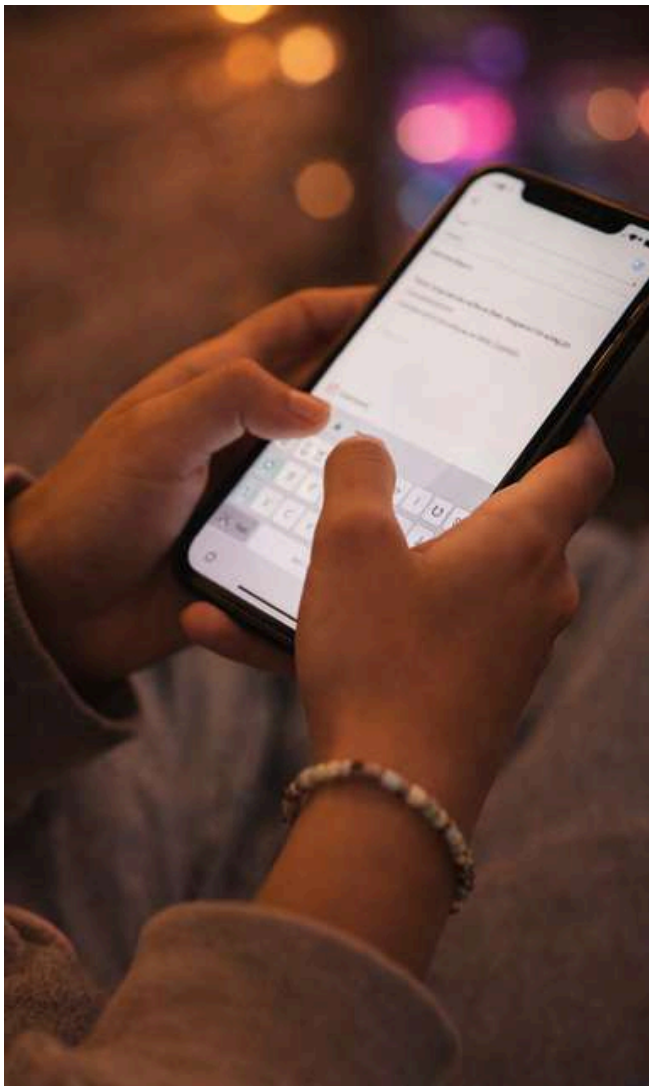
## 05. Message someone you haven't talked to in a while.

Nothing long. Nothing heavy. Just: "Thought of you today. Hope you're good." That's it. That's enough.

# We Want to Hear From You

This magazine only works if it includes you.

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Our next issue (Summer 2026) is about The Digital You. Online friendships, screen life, digital identity, and what happens when group chats go wrong. We want:

**Your questions for Ask The Effect.**

What's the situation you're dealing with? What would you ask if nobody was watching? Everything's published anonymously.

**Your stories.**

Has something happened online that changed how you think about digital life? Tell us, in your own words, however long or short. Everything's anonymised.

**Your ideas.**

What do you want us to write about? What did we get right? What did we miss? Tell us.

**Submit to:**

[hello@thebullyeffect.com](mailto:hello@thebullyeffect.com)

All submissions are confidential. We never publish identifying details without your permission.



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