

# Unhealthy friendships

Your children's friends may not all have good intentions.

If your child is in an unhealthy friendship, they may be manipulated, taken advantage of, or made to do something they don't want to do.

If your child was at risk, would you spot the signs?

Young people are often unaware they are in an unhealthy or unsafe friendship. Parents are unlikely to be aware of what is happening.



## Possible signs a young person is in an unhealthy friendship:

-  Sudden behaviour changes such as becoming secretive, defensive, insecure or self-conscious
-  A new friendship group, or withdrawing from family, old friends, hobbies or interests
-  Unexplained fear of specific people or places
-  Becoming anxious after receiving text messages or calls
-  Unexplained injuries, marks or bruises
-  Expressing fear about the way a person may react to a certain situation
-  Changes in spending habits or financial situation
-  Trying to excuse another person's behaviour

Unhealthy friendships can take many different forms and behaviours are not always physical

**Emotional abuse:** degrading, humiliating, criticising, name calling, applying peer pressure – this can impact your child's self-confidence

**Isolation:** being kept away from healthy friendships, family, or other support – this can make your child feel they depend on the person harming them

**Threats:** threatening, scaring, hurting or manipulating – this can help to gain power or control over your child



Find out more and get support

NSPCC  0808 800 5000



Created by Cambridge City Council

# What to do if you're worried about your child or a child you know

Remember, **you're not to blame.**  
And **your child may be vulnerable or scared.**



## Talk to your child

Let them know they can talk to you about anything. Ask them questions about what's going on, tell them that you want to help them and keep them safe.

Try to get them to see the reality of their situation. Be open, honest and non-judgemental; remember they may be scared.

## Gather evidence

Consider gathering evidence if a crime might have been committed against your child. For example, save messages they have received that show the concerning behaviour, or take photos or videos of injuries caused by someone you think is harming your child.

## Get help and support

Talk to your child's school or another professional – see useful contacts below.

## When to tell the Police

If your child stays away from home, you should report them as missing to the Police immediately. If you are worried about your child's safety, report these fears to the Police or your child's school.

## Useful contacts

Crimestoppers **0800 555 111**

Missing People Safecall (call or text) **116 000**

Cambridgeshire Constabulary **101**

NSPCC **0808 800 5000**

Support & advice for parents | NSPCC

**If a child or young person is in immediate danger call 999**

## Children's Social Care

Peterborough **01733 864180**

Cambridgeshire **0345 045 5203**

Out of hours emergency team **01733 234724**