

Topic 2

Online Friends versus Offline Friends

Friendship in a high-tech world

Technology is changing the way we make friends and stay in touch with our friends. Here is a radio programme that looks at new and old ways of making friends. Three young people – Kay, Jake, and Chris – talk about friendships in the online and offline world.

Female presenter: Here's a startling statistic: 25% of UK adolescents say they have feelings of loneliness. So we invited a group of young people into the studio to talk about friendship – both in real life and online. This is what they said ...

Presenter: We live in a time of high tech communication. Do you think there is now a breakdown in the way we communicate with each other?

Kay: It's not a breakdown; it's a change. There are so many different ways to talk to friends now – texts, tweets, social networks, online gaming, and also face-to-face contacts. Most of the time I use a mix of these.

Jake: That's right. I know this is going to sound strange, but I think online friendships can be better than real-life friendships. Online friendships can be more pure.

Chris: You're joking?

Jake: I mean that online you don't judge people by their appearance. You judge them by what they say and how they behave.

Chris: Wait a minute! I don't choose my friends because of how they look.

Jake: Yes you do. In real life you would probably avoid someone who looks strange. Or someone who is dressed funny. Anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable. But that doesn't happen with online friendships. When I'm gaming I don't always know what the other players look like. Sometimes I think it's better to have online friends – I'm friends with them because I like their personality. If you see a picture of them, there can be discrimination. Some people are racist, or they are unfriendly to someone who is overweight. If you don't know what they look like, you're friends with them because of their thoughts.

Kay: Don't know what your gaming friends look like?

Jake: I've seen some of them on web cam. But I don't check out everyone I meet online. It's not important.

Kay: I think it is. Maybe you are talking to a middle-aged man who's pretending to be a teen. Don't you think that's creepy? It would freak me out.

Jake: Yes. That's why I don't give out personal information – unless I've met the person in real life. And you can listen to their voice. Then you know if the person is a lot older.

Kay: But you can't really know someone online. All you know is what they want you to know about them.

Chris: It's the same in real life. We all want to give an image of ourselves to the world. We're doing it now, here in this studio.

Kay: Yes, but in real life we see how people behave in different situations. We see how they behave in school, with their friends, with their little brother, with their sports team. We have a better picture of who we're making friends with. That doesn't happen online. Online we are who we say you are. We control what people see in our profile picture. So what you see online can be totally fake. That's why you can trust real-life friends more.

Chris: Not always. I trusted my ex-girlfriend and she ...

Kay: Cheating on someone is different. Real-life friends are less phony. A lot of people lie online so that people think they are cool and interesting.

Chris: I get your point, but not everyone is phony online. I've been chatting to this guy in São Paulo in Brazil and now I know a lot about life in Brazil. Because of technology we have a bigger network of friends than our parents. I'm also learning some Portuguese.

Kay: Maybe, but most people online hang out with people like themselves. Look at Jake, for example, he just hangs out with other gamers.

Jake: OK, you got me.