



THE IDEA FRAMEWORK

This strategy is suggested in the 11-14 BrainWaves lesson:

Building connections and friendships

About the strategy

The IDEA framework proposes 4 strands for developing and growing friendships:

- **Initiate** - reach out or start a connection
- **Disclose** - share something personal to build warmth
- **Expose** - allow vulnerability and repeated interaction
- **Affirm** - reinforce and value the other person

The framework has been modified slightly in the lesson to suggest **Deepen** (instead of **Disclose**) to make it more appropriate for young people.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

The strategy is an adaptation of the IDEA framework proposed by psychologist and professor, Dr Marisa G. Franco, author of *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make and Keep Friends*. It is not based on peer-reviewed academic-research but is offered as a practical, evidence-inspired framework for making and strengthening friendships. Individual studies however support use of the framework with adolescents:

INITIATE

Research shows that people usually underestimate how much others like them; this is known as “the liking gap”. After conversations with new people, participants systematically underestimated how much their conversation partners liked them and enjoyed their company. Most people are therefore liked more than they think they are after interactions and are happier than we think when someone reaches out.

- Boothby, E. J., et al. (2018). *The liking gap in conversations: Do people like us more than we think?* Psychological Science, 29(11), 1742–1756.

DISCLOSE / DEEPEN

Studies show that appropriate self-disclosure (sharing a bit about yourself) increases closeness and trust - even in young people. This longitudinal study found that higher levels



of self-disclosure among teens predicted increases in friendship quality over time, indicating that exchanging personal information is linked to stronger, closer peer bonds.

- Costello, M. A., et al. (2024). *Adolescent social learning within supportive friendships: Self-disclosure and relationship quality from adolescence to adulthood*. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 34(3), 805–817.

EXPOSE

Research shows that being your real self with others (being authentic) is linked with better friendship quality and psychological thriving. This suggests that when teens can be themselves with a friend - not acting or pretending - the friendship context supports their wellbeing, identity development and self-esteem.

- Alchin, C. E., et al. (2025). *Adolescents' state authenticity and inauthenticity when socialising online with a friend: Motivations in friendship*. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 260, 106343.
- Metheny, J., & McWhirter, B. T. (2008). *Girls' relationship authenticity and self-esteem across adolescence*. Journal of Adolescent Research, 23(6), 719–743.

AFFIRM

Studies show that prosocial behaviour (kindness, helping, support) is a reliable part of friendship quality indicators in adolescence. This study demonstrates consistent positive associations between prosocial behaviour and positive friendship quality indicators (support, closeness, intimacy) across childhood and adolescence.

- Dryburgh, N. et al. (2022) *Associations between interpersonal behavior and friendship quality in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analysis*. Child Development. 2022 May; 93(3): e332-e347.

Further reading

Watch Dr Franco's talk for the American Psychology Association on 'How to create and deepen connections': <https://youtu.be/yMctfi8-Gso?si=IGd5jHKOyp6OmTJd>