



CHANGING FRIENDS: SILENT

When someone is different to you, it can be easy to think you've got nothing in common. But the one thing we all have in common is the need for friendships, and to be treated with kindness.

See

- **What is happening?**
A hearing impaired young woman is ostracised and vilified in silence, at school.
- **Who are the people involved?**
Everyone, and, in particular, three classmates. Eventually, one of this trio and is moved by kindness to embrace the other.
- **Who gains from this situation? Who loses?**
The power and fear of difference-being hearing impaired is a disability, which is amplified by isolation, victimisation and belittlement. Teenagers are hyper-sensitive to exclusion. Ultimately no one gains, and onlookers/bystanders reinforce the ostracization through their inaction.
- **What is the situation doing to people?**
Normalisation of disability as difference, which for some justifies the criticism and isolation of this young woman.
- **Why is it happening? Why does it continue?**
An individual is isolated, the classmates take photos of them alone. The suspicion of someone who is different, and/or lack of empathy, and/or fear of choosing against the crowd, offering kindness rather than indifference.

Act

- **What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening (the reality) and what should be happening (the ideal/what our faith says)?**
Assist my teenager to navigate the ups and downs, the acceptance and rejection that comes with group dynamics and the rejection of those who are different. Foster relationships with people of different abilities, ages and challenges (including physical and mental health). Explore whether there are options to be involved in supportive communities, including L'Arche, Disability support services, Parish care groups.
- **What action are we going to take?**
'Those we most often exclude from the normal life of society, people with disabilities, have profound lessons to teach us.' (Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 2008). As an adult, engage with my teenager to help them better understand the range of different disabilities and challenges faced by the broader community. Bring curiosity, facts and empathy, not judgement.
- **Who can we involve in our action?**
Members of my neighbourhood, my extended family, with disability. Try to be connected with them, know who they are.... Together form the 'village' required to create an understanding, supportive and cohesive community.

Judge

- **How do you feel about this situation?**
As a parent/adult, I can be both understanding from experience of rejection, and concerned when teenagers are self-absorbed, or fearful of being excluded if they speak up or act differently.
- **Have you ever behaved or acted like anyone in the situation? If so, what happened? Why? How did you and/or those involved feel?**
As an adult, I can identify with the 'silent' behaviour and experience. I have experienced acceptance and rejection from others, and know how difficult this can be. As human beings we share much more in common, than difference, which we use to divide us.
- **What do you think should be happening?**
Curiosity about and understanding of those with hearing impairment. Exploring how communication beyond words can foster friendship and acceptance.
- **What does our faith say about it?**
'We human beings are all fundamentally the same. We all belong to a common, broken humanity. We all have wounded, vulnerable hearts. Each one of us needs to feel appreciated and understood; we all need help.' (Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, a Christian community for people with disability, *Becoming Human*, 2008).