

## Long distance friendship

During the solitude of Covid-19, friendships evolved and found new ways to thrive. Mine was no different! Before lockdown, I saw my friends every day. On the walk to school, we would gather and discuss last night's gaming adventures; in the playground we'd act them out; and during school, we'd look forward to the play dates we'd have arranged once the school bell rang.

Looking back on it now, perhaps I took that fun, free time for granted. Since the outbreak of Coronavirus, I miss my daily updates with my friends, the three amigos - I even miss the insignificant arguments we would have. When we were at school, I knew exactly how to follow the school rules and behave with my friends - plus, if we ever had an argument, we could quickly make up since we were in the same classroom all day. Back then, I knew that our teachers would help and sometimes we needed their help so that we could find the right way to deal with a tricky situation.

For instance, one horrible day last year, John and I got into a huge argument because James got hit by the ball, and we couldn't agree on whose fault it was. Unfortunately, we both said things that we shouldn't have, however, our teacher helped us write letters to each other to calmly explain our feelings and discuss what we could have done differently enabling us to make up and move on.

Well, now it is all different. We have to communicate through online games and social media. I desperately miss my friends and really want to play with them, but sometimes I don't understand the rules of online friendships. It's hard to know when someone is joking because we can't see each other's faces or expressions. Picking up on their tone of voice through text is near impossible! I hate not seeing my friends.

At the moment, I'm feeling very anxious and worried about going online and talking to my best friends. Last week, we were playing Minecraft and making a brand-new world where we could all play. Filled with excitement, we bounced on our gaming chairs desperate to share all our ideas. Regretfully, I got carried away and was talking over James and John with my excitement bubbling over. I couldn't contain myself! However, I realise now that I didn't know the rules of sharing and talking online.

It was at that moment, getting frustrated and cross, John blurted out, "BEN, YOU ARE RUINING OUR GAME! You aren't listening to us and you are just doing whatever you want to do."

Shocked by what I was hearing I froze - I hadn't realised I was upsetting anyone.

John angrily continued, "You are so horrible and you can't even play this properly. I've had enough! You can't play with us anymore!" Then, he blocked me without anymore discussion. Feeling numb and confused, I just didn't understand what had just happened and what I had done so wrong!

Early the next morning, I woke up with excitement after dreaming about the perfect addition to the wonderland we were creating! Suddenly, a nasty feeling gripped my stomach as I remembered my friend didn't want to play with me anymore. Feeling anxious, I went online to see if John and James had moved on from yesterday's argument like at school. Surely they had. The three amigos never fell out for more than a few hours! As I switched my console on, James popped up on my screen!

"Hello, Ben! Where have you been? I've been on here since 7am" chimed James' animation. Relief swept over me - James was still my friend!

"Hi James! I have so many cool ideas! I can't wait to get started! Where's John?" I gushed excitedly.

"Sorry Ben, but John has unfriended you. He is online telling me lots of unkind things about you. He said you're really mean and no body wants to be friends with you." James typed.

Instantly, I felt the blood drain from my face and my mouth went dry. With trepidation, I typed using my increasingly hot, clammy hands. "Oh... I see."

James continued to tell me the things John was saying about me online. As you can imagine, this made me feel horrifically dreadful and like everybody hated me! I don't think James realised that telling me these things was one of the most upsetting parts about it. Surely my friends would stand up for me and look after me!

It has been nearly a week since we fell out. Feeling lost and disconcerted, all I can think about now is the fact that I miss my friends so much and being at home without seeing them is so hard! Why can't we all be friends and treat each other with kindness? What am I going to do?!