

Children with language disorders may fall victim to false friends, study warns

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Best friends and friendship by Kevin, Andy and Mia (respectively). Credit: *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* (2024). DOI: 10.1111/1460-6984.13021

Children with language disorders may fall victim to false friends, who may misuse their trust, a study warns.

Pupils with difficulties communicating may lack awareness of the motives, thoughts, and feelings of peers, especially when distinguishing between good and bad friends.

The importance of physical proximity and play to their understanding of friendship may also leave them susceptible to false relationships. This means that children with language disorders may consider peers as

friends just because they have been willing to play with them. They may not think of their peers' motives.

The [study](#), led by Dr. Lenka Janik Blaskova from the University of Exeter, is published in the *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*.

Researchers interviewed 14 children with learning disabilities at the age of 6 to 8 years in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Children attended enhanced provision, specific speech and language classes, and mainstream classrooms. Their understanding of friendship varied from physical presence to mutual support and sharing.

Children with language disorders did not mention their language or communication abilities as a barrier to making friends.

Many of those who took part in the study said they found it easy to make friends. Those who said it was hard attributed this to unfamiliarity with their peers in their environment. None mentioned language or communication difficulties as potential obstacles.

Dr. Blaskova said, "To successfully navigate the complex nature of friendships, children need to develop robust social and emotional capacities. Children with language disorder can be at a disadvantage in their interactions with their peers."

However, the study warns children's "immature" understanding of relationships means they are susceptible to making false friends.

Children's understanding of what a good friend was also based on how they played and took part in [physical activity](#) with them.

For children, friendship came from sitting together in class, joining

gardening clubs, and school activities. To them, an ideal friend was someone displaying kind, caring, and helpful behaviors toward children with language disorders.

Dr. Blaskova said, "For children with language disorder play may represent a [safe environment](#) to make friends and to test out if peers are good or bad friends. For some, play is much more than just a way of interacting with others. It was concerning to us to see they had a lower understanding of what a bad friend was."

Many [young offenders](#) with language disorders have a higher risk of reoffending, and the study indicates there is a possibility that [rehabilitation services](#) may need to look at addressing underlying issues, which are linked to a poor understanding of who a good and bad friend is.

More information: Lenka Janik Blaskova et al, Exploring concepts of friendship formation in children with language disorder using a qualitative framework analysis, *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/1460-6984.13021](https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.13021)

Provided by University of Exeter

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