

On Again, Off Again

Developmental Perspective

Belonging and having friends become increasingly important during early adolescence. Belonging is dependent on certain “rules” about how to behave, and it is very common for relationships to be on again, off again. Although this instability is a common phenomenon, confusion and other unpleasant feelings can be associated with it.

Objectives

- ▷ To identify factors that contribute to on again, off again friendship patterns
- ▷ To recognize feelings associated with on again, off again friendship patterns and learn how to deal with them
- ▷ To learn not to equate on again, off again relationships with lasting rejection or feelings of worthlessness

Materials

- ▷ Paper and pencil for each student
- ▷ A copy of the On Again, Off Again–Scenario (Handout 14) for each student

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students to take out paper and pencils and write responses to the following questions as you read them aloud:
 - ▶ Have you ever been friends with someone for a while, but then you or the friend broke it off for a while and then later resumed the friendship?
 - ▶ If you and a friend broke off, who initiated the breakup?
 - ▶ How did you feel about this?
 - ▶ What happened so that you resumed the friendship? Who initiated this?
 - ▶ Would you rather keep the same friends or switch off and on?
2. Distribute the On Again, Off Again–Scenario (Handout 14) to each student. Have students read the scenario and answer the questions at the end. Have them share responses with partners.
3. Discuss the Content and Personalization Questions.

Discussion

CONTENT QUESTIONS

1. Were you able to identify with the situation described in the scenario?
If so, in what ways?
2. Do you think this happens as regularly with boys as with girls? If not, why do you think it is different?
3. Why do you think friendships are off and on during this period in your life?

PERSONALIZATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel if you and your friends are on again, off again?
Are these positive or negative feelings?
2. What do you do to deal with the negative feelings that may result from this experience?
3. If someone rejects you for a while, do you think it will last forever?
4. Even if someone rejects you and you never get back together, does this mean that everyone dislikes you or that you are worthless?

Follow-up Activity

If possible, invite older students (good role models) to discuss how they handle these friendship issues and whether the issues are as prevalent as adolescents get older.

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SCENARIO—PAGE 1

Instructions: Read the scenario, and think about whether you have experienced anything like this in your peer relationships. Answer the questions at the end.

Jamie, an eighth grader, usually hung out with the same group of six or eight girls and guys. Usually some of them went to the mall together on Saturday or went to someone's house to listen to music, play pool, or watch movies. Lately Jamie hadn't been getting along well with the girls in the group because they had been starting rumors about her and spreading them around to others. She didn't understand why they were doing it, but it seemed like no matter what she said it didn't matter . . . they still weren't calling her as often, and she knew that she'd been excluded from a slumber party.

For several days the girls all ignored her at school and refused to sit by her at lunch. She felt terrible. She was beginning to wonder if she'd ever have friends again. At night she'd try calling them, but they always made excuses about why they couldn't talk on the phone. She asked several of the guys to talk to them, but they either didn't do it or couldn't get a straight answer. Finally she wrote her best friend, Alicia, a note and told her that she didn't understand what was going on. She begged Alicia to stop ignoring her. After a couple of days, Alicia finally called Jamie and told her that now she was mad at the others because they were saying things about her, too. She and Jamie agreed to stick together, so the situation for both of them was a little more bearable. At least they each had one friend.

Things went on this way for about a week, and then one day one of the girls asked Jamie and Alicia if they wanted to go to McDonald's after school. A couple of the others went along, and they had a pretty good time. Nothing was said about what had been happening, but they gradually started hanging out together again, just like before. Jamie and Alicia wondered how long it would last, and they weren't surprised when the same thing happened to two of the others in the group a few weeks later.

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SCENARIO—PAGE 2

1. Why do you think these girls were ignoring Jamie?

2. Do you think Jamie could have done anything to prevent the girls from treating her this way? If so, what?

3. When Jamie got back together with her friends, do you think she felt any differently about these girls? Do you think she should have gotten back together with them?

Consider the Consequences

Developmental Perspective

Because they are just in the beginning stages of developing formal operational thinking skills, many young adolescents lack the ability to identify the numerous consequences associated with most choices. Because at this age they are strongly influenced by peers to engage in activities that may have undesirable consequences, it is particularly important to help them identify and evaluate consequences of their choices.

Objectives

- ▷ To identify consequences associated with typical choices
- ▷ To differentiate between short- and long-term consequences

Materials

- ▷ Six index cards with the following situations printed on them (one per card):
 - Cheating on a test
 - Lying to your parent(s)
 - Coming home late
 - Smoking cigarettes or drinking beer
 - Not studying for a test
 - Believing something that someone tells you without listening to the “source”
- ▷ Paper and pencil for each group of four students

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students to define the word *consequence* (result of an action). Emphasize that consequences can be short term or long term. Use the following to illustrate:

Eric left his new jacket in the locker room after practice. As a result, he was cold when he had to walk home without it (short-term consequence). When he got to school the next day, he went to the lost and found box, but the jacket wasn't there. Eric's mother told him that if he didn't find it he would have to use his birthday money (which he was hoping to use to buy a Sega game) to buy a new jacket (long-term consequence).

2. Divide students into groups of four, and have each group appoint a recorder. Give each group one of the situation cards. Ask each group to read and discuss the situation, identifying the consequences they think would result from doing what the card describes. The recorder should list the short- and long-term consequences on a sheet of paper as the group identifies them.
3. After the groups have identified consequences, have them make up short skits that illustrate the situations and the consequences.
4. Allow time for each group to present its skit and for the other groups to identify the situation and the consequences.
5. Discuss the Content and Personalization Questions.

Discussion

CONTENT QUESTIONS

1. Relative to your topic, was it easy to identify the consequences?
Why or why not?
2. Were you able to identify both short- and long-term consequences?
Do you think there are both kinds of consequences for every decision?

PERSONALIZATION QUESTIONS

1. When you make decisions, do you always consider the consequences?
2. Which is easier for you to identify when you make a decision—the short-term or the long-term consequences? Do you think it is important to consider both?
If so, why?
3. What did you learn from this activity that you can apply to your own life?

Follow-up Activity

Have students keep logs of all their decisions and the possible short- and long-term consequences for three days. Then schedule time for them to share this information with the total group.