

NAVIGATING THE CHANGING dynamics of friendship

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When I shifted curricula after grade 10 and became a private A level candidate, I was faced with a lot of changes. I could easily adapt to most of them within a few weeks, but one that bothered me for a long time was not being able to meet my friends as frequently as before. From spending a significant portion of my days with my friends, to hardly meeting anyone once a week, I felt as if we were drifting apart.

Soumya Suvra Das, 18, also a private A level candidate, felt the same, "Not being able to meet classmates in person was very rough. The circles seemed to fall off after college classes began and it felt like we were thrown into divergent timelines."

This particular stream of thought might hit close to home for a lot of people. As we grow up, the way we used to view friendships undergoes some major changes. While this might seem like a sign of weak commitment, that isn't the case at all. Friendships are dynamic relationships that have variegated meanings and significance across different ages and social circles. Therefore, it is only normal for them to evolve with time.

There are many ways in which one might find their standings with friends shift over the years. Abdullah Noman, 19, a student of St. Gregory's High School & College, moved homes at the age of 16 and found himself unable to come to grips with the desolation that came with it.

"I spent the better half of my teenage and pre-teen years with my neighbouring friends, playing at a nearby field almost every day," he shared. "After I moved, things never felt the same because playing sports together was our primary medium of bonding. With that taken away, I distanced myself largely."

A conflict of interest during formative years is also one of the driving forces behind a change in friendship dynamics. As people feel inclined towards different fields and interests, the conversations that might take place between them keep narrowing down, leading to a somewhat awkward shift in their friendship.

Faisal Rahman*, 17, an SSC 2024 candidate from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, shared his experience, "Throughout ninth grade, I developed a bunch of niche interests that seemed foreign to my friends who were more into bodybuilding and sports at the time. Naturally, I made new friends who shared my interests and started talking less to my old friends."

He continued, "At the time, I assumed that this was the end of our bond, but only now do I realise that it is perfectly fine to have friendships where we don't interact all the time."

Eahsan Abedin, 18, had a unique predicament when he spent an exchange year in the United States during tenth grade. Being halfway around the world and in completely conflicting time zones from his lifelong friends, Eahsan's perception of kinship went through a rollercoaster of ups and downs.

"Distance made me question my most cherished lifelong relationships in a way I hadn't thought of before," he lamented. "I questioned every small aspect of every single one of those relationships — realising that maybe some of those weren't as strong as I thought they were. Since I was already going through a lot in a completely new environment, these unsavoury emotions took me through several phases — times of helplessness, sadness, and grudges against friends."

There are countless such examples of incidents that caused people to drift away from their friends because

of a shift in their relationships. But what needs to be understood is that this is only a normal course of life. People's priorities and responsibilities are ever-growing, and this naturally translates to less time being allocated towards peers. You might not meet your friends as frequently as you used to, or conversations might be few and far between, but as long as all involved parties can come to terms with these facts, there's hardly any reason for a friendship to fall through.

Mst. Fazilatun Nessa, Counselling Psychologist at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), believes that changing friendships is a normal part of kids growing up.

"As kids leave the comfort of elementary school and enter middle school and then high school, they will inevitably meet new friends. Their schedules will dictate who they see most often and create opportunities to build relationships with new people and potentially leave old friends behind," she asserts.

To cope with these changing dynamics, she advises young people to understand early on that life is often unpredictable, and we should hold onto the people who matter to us no matter the circumstances.

As Soumya said, "With time, I came to realise that physical or emotional distance didn't waver us friends and instead everyone simply got busier. It changed my definition of a friend to 'someone who you hold a deep connection with, even without interacting regularly.'"

**Names have been changed upon request for privacy*

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