

Parent/Carer Friendships Toolkit

A resource for parents & carers to help younger children who are experiencing challenges with friendships and peer relationships.

STEP (Swindon)

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About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help parents and carers of younger children who are experiencing challenges with friendships and peer relationships. It explores the reasons why children sometimes struggle in these areas and provides ways of supporting them to make and maintain friendships. As a parent or carer it can be upsetting and concerning if your child struggles to make friends or appears socially isolated. This toolkit aims to help in supporting them to improve and maintain their peer relationships

What are friendships and peer relationships?

Wikipedia defines friendship as:

People who are friends talk to each other and spend time together. They trust one another and also help each other when they are in trouble or are hurt. Friends are people that can be looked up to and trusted. Usually friends have similar interests. A friend is one who admires a person's skill and helps or encourages them to make the right choices and do not get into any trouble at all.

The strength of the bond of friendship between two people can vary. If the bond is very strong, they are called best friends. This can usually be achieved by possessing the elements of friendship, by being kind, generous, loyal, honest and by having fun. With these qualities you can truly enjoy the bliss of friendship.

There are expectations, demands and complaints in friendship too. If friends don't match with your expectations, it does not mean you will break the friendship. It is all about understanding, realizing and helping whenever possible.

Friendship is both good and necessary. Man cannot live all alone. He is a social being. He needs someone to share his joys and sorrows. Generally, it is only people of similar age, character and background, mentality, etc., who can understand him and his problems. Friends are needed for support and for sharing.

There are many different types of friendships. Most people find friends at a very young age however it is harder for others.

Peer relationships

Peer relationships are relationships that a young person has with others of a similar age to themselves. Some of the skills children learn through their peer relationships include assertiveness, conflict management, how to earn respect and control aggression.

Why are friendships important?

Studies have found that friendships enable children to learn more about themselves and develop their own identity. And, as children mature, friends are able to help reduce stress and navigate challenging developmental experiences, especially during teenage years.

What makes a good friend?

Discuss this information with your child or young person, ask them what they think makes a good friend!

Having good friends makes you happy, and being a good friend to others makes them happy, too. Think about your friendships - are you being a good friend? Are your friends being a good friend to you?

Good friends make you feel good

Good friends say and do things that make you feel good, giving compliments and congratulations and being happy for you.

Good friends support each other

If you're feeling down, a good friend will support you. If you need help, a good friend will try to help you out.

Good friends don't always have everything in common

Everyone is different, and has different hobbies and interests. Even if you're not into the exact same things, a good friend will encourage you rather than making you feel bad for liking a different band, activity, TV show or animal! A good friend understands that sometimes you do your own thing, and enjoys doing the things you have in common together.

Good friends listen

A good friend allows you to talk and doesn't interrupt you. They're interested in what you have to say.

Good friends are trustworthy

If you tell a good friend something private, they won't share it. You can trust a good friend not to be judgmental.

Good friends handle conflict respectfully and respect boundaries

Sometimes you and your friend might disagree on something. Sometimes you might have said or done something that upset your friend. A good friend will tell you if you've done something to hurt them. If you tell a good friend they've hurt you, they'll be sorry and won't do it again.

Good friendships go both ways

It's not a good friendship if one of you is doing all the talking and the other is doing all the listening, all the time. Good friends make each other feel good, rather than one friend receiving all the compliments and the other giving them all the time. In a good friendship, you're making each other feel great!

Having a group of friends

Don't limit yourself by having just one "best friend". Your friendship is something special which you can share with everyone who needs a friend! Sometimes friends drift apart or fall out. That's a part of life. Having more than one friend means it's more likely there will be someone who can help you when you need it.

Friends not followers

In the digital world you can feel under pressure to have a lot of friends and followers. Remember that you only need a small circle of friends to be happy, and it's a good idea to keep your most precious (and private) thoughts and moments for those that really care about you.

When you ask your young person what they think makes a good friend you can get them to complete the "**Friendship wreath**" in the back of this toolkit to record their ideas.

Ask your young person if they think they are a good friend or not, ask them if they do the things that they have said make a good friend. You can ask them to complete the "**Am I a good friend**" quiz in the resources section of the toolkit. If they do not think they are a good friend then ask them why and discuss ways that they could do better.

Talk to your young person about what their ideal friend would be like? How would they behave and what would their personality be like? You can ask them to complete the "**What I would like in a friend**" worksheet in the resource section of this toolkit to create their fantastic friend.

What is not a good friend? - Friendships and 'frenemies'

Talk to your young person about what is not a good friend, share this information with them and ask them if they have ever experienced any “not good” friendships. If they have then ask them what they did to manage this and how it made them feel. Discuss ideas of how they could manage these situations in the future. You can ask your young person to record their ideas on the “**not a good friend**” worksheet in the resources section of this toolkit.

Sometimes people who claim to be your friends can show bullying behaviour. In pop culture, that's called a 'frenemy' or 'frenemies'.

- They might say “brutally honest” things to you which are unkind or hurtful
- Put pressure on you to do things you don't want to do
- Be manipulative (e.g. 'If you were my friend you would...')
- Put you down
- Laugh at you, or encourage others to laugh at you
- Talk about you behind your back
- Deliberately exclude you from group chat and activities
- Take the “banter” too far
- Share things about you online
- Make you feel bad about yourself

Banter vs bullying

Banter between friends can be fun, and when everyone's in on the joke and enjoying themselves, it's an important form of communication that bonds people together.

However it can shift into bullying when someone is upset, hurt or offended, and the other person refuses to stop. For example, if someone keeps teasing you about something over and over again, even if they can see you're no longer finding it funny, it's shifting into bullying behaviour.

Another form of banter that can shift into bullying behaviour (and sometimes prejudicial behaviour and harassment) is when friends pick on a physical trait or a characteristic of someone in the group and repeatedly use this as a focus of jokes or comments (e.g. someone's weight, skin colour, ethnic background, religion, sexuality, gender). You may feel under pressure to laugh, but it's still a form of bullying.

What to do if you have a “Frenemy”

If you think you might have a frenemy or your friends have been overstepping the mark, here’s what to do.

Remember: the problem isn’t you

Hold on to that thought. Their behaviour might make you feel bad, but they need to change, not you.

Talk to them about how their behaviour makes you feel

Explain calmly and without accusation. Be specific, for example “I feel upset that you kicked me out of the group chat” or “I hate you saying that about my hair.” Tell them what you’d like to happen - for example, setting a boundary such as certain topics being off-limits.

Their response will tell you a lot

Sometimes our behaviour hurts others without us realising. A good friend will be sorry that they made you feel bad, and not do it again. A frenemy is more likely say you’re overreacting or blame you for how they treated you.

If they apologise, give them another chance

If they mean it, they’ll change their behaviour and stop making you feel bad. However, sometimes frenemies might apologise insincerely, and their behaviour afterwards won’t change. If they’re still making you feel bad despite what you’ve told them, it’s time to move on.

Make new friends

Moving on can be scary, but you deserve people in your life who support you and make you feel good about yourself. See our guide to making new friends for help.

Don’t retaliate

It can be tempting to encourage others to exclude your former frenemy, or to put them down behind their back. Don’t do this: you’re only showing the same behaviour you found difficult in them.

What if they retaliate?

After the friendship ends, your former frenemy might lash out, or spread rumours about you. In time it’s likely they’ll get bored and moved on. If you do struggle with this then speak with a parent/ carer or other trusted adult such as a teacher, they will be able to help you with any bullying behaviour you are experiencing.

Ways to make friends

It's important for all of us to have friends; people who care about us and make us smile. Whether you're feeling lonely, starting a new school or just open to exploring new friendships, here's how you can make new friends.

Meet other people

Joining a club, youth group or getting involved in an activity you enjoy is a great way of meeting new people. It's also a boost to your confidence to do something you love! Do some research about what's available in your area, and choose something that interests you. If you are unsure of where to start, ask someone to help you, or ask others for ideas.

Help other people

Volunteering in your local community can be a great way to meet other people.

Be a great listener

Introduce yourself to new people, ask questions about them, really listen to their answers and look for common ground.

Show you're open with your body language

If you look like you're trying to make yourself as small as possible, or you look threatening, people might not want to talk to you. Keep your body language open and relaxed when talking to people. Hold your head up high and be proud of who you are!

Make an effort

Don't wait for others to arrange something. Ask your new friends if they'd like to hang out! Invite them to take part in activities with you.

Be a good friend

Be a good friend to your new friends. Be trustworthy, listen to them, be respectful and supportive.

Choose good friends

You deserve good friends. Surround yourself with people who make you feel good, and don't pursue friendships with people who don't.

Keeping your friendships

Here are some tips and ideas of how you can keep your friendships with others. Sometimes, it's hard to keep your friendships on track. Lots of things can happen in life that make your friendships change.

Make time for one another

You may both be really busy and have different hobbies and interests. Book time in when you can spend time together like you always have. It could just be going to each other's house for dinner, or going to the park or cinema together.

Talk about how you are feeling

If you feel like you are missing your friend, don't be afraid to tell them. It is very likely that they are feeling the same. Be open and honest so they know how much you care about them.

Friendships only work well if you are equally supportive

If you are listening to your friend's worries all the time, but you need to talk about what is worrying you, be honest and discuss both your worries openly.

Try to make time to do something that is fun

The best way of doing this is to try something totally new to both of you. If you are both a bit nervous about doing something, this will help to bring you closer again as well. Remember to laugh at yourself and each other!

Try to accept that your friendships will change

Try to see this as an opportunity to have a much wider circle of friends. Making new friends doesn't mean you have to lose your old friends! If your old friends are worried, reassure them and keep them involved with new friends.

Resources Section

In this section, you will find:

Useful worksheets

Online support links

Support telephone numbers

Useful videos

A good friend

Write something in the heart on each hand that you think makes someone a good friend.
What should a friend be like?

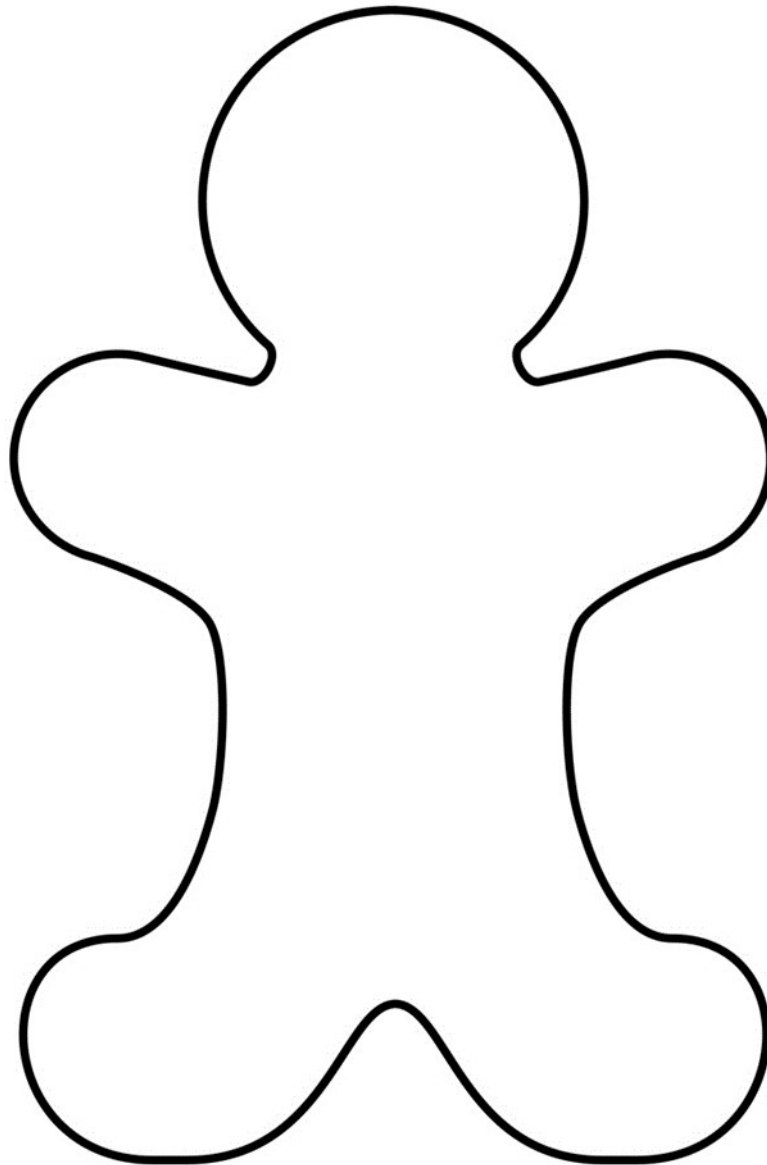


Am I a good friend?

	Yes	A little bit	No
I like it when people share their toys with me			
I like to play by myself			
I like playing in a group			
I like to play in a pair			
I like it when my friends give me a compliment			
I like it when my friends listen to me			
I like to listen to my friends			
I like to ask people to play			
I like to have friends			

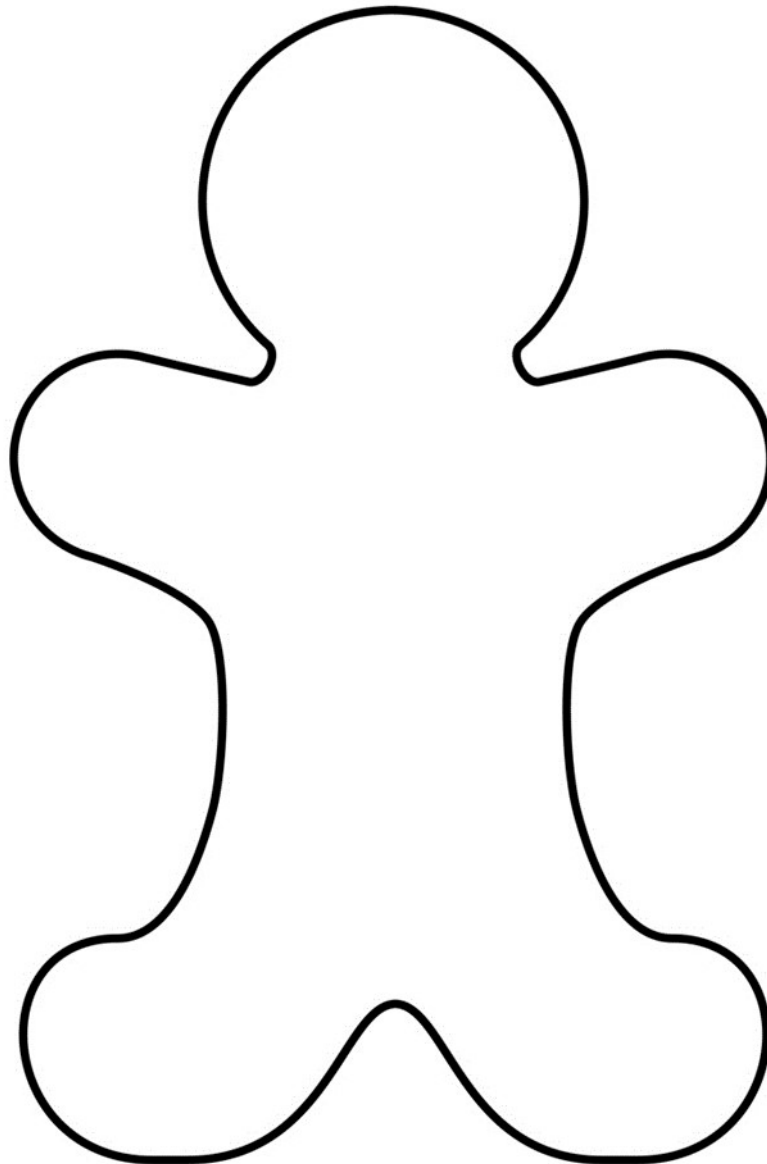
What would I like in a friend?

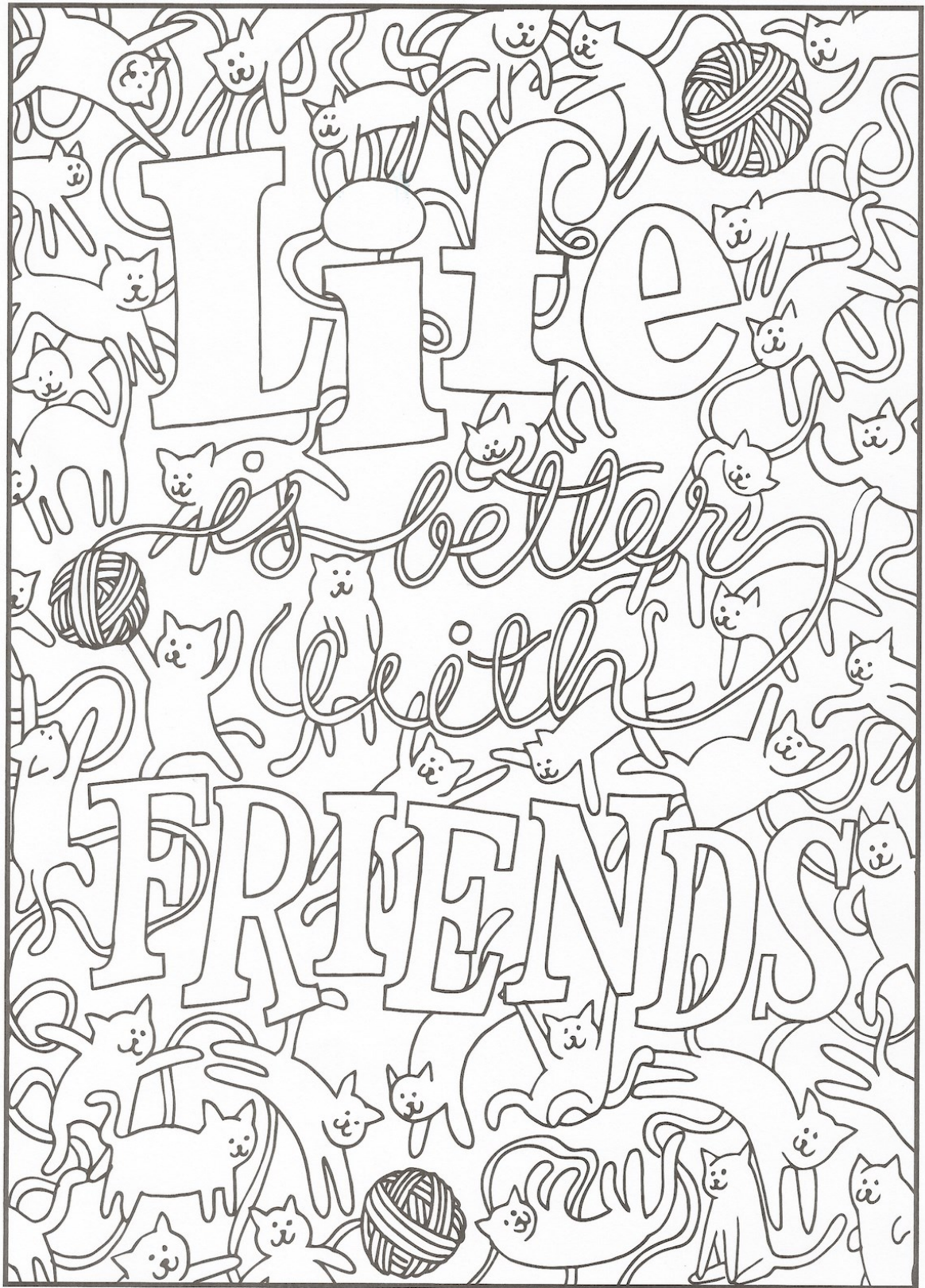
Think about your ideal friend, what makes them a good friend? What is important to you when looking for a friend? Write your ideas next to the gingerbread person to make them a fantastic friend!



Not a good friend

Think about what a “not good” friend is? What behaviour within a friendship would mean that someone is not a good friend? Write your ideas next to the gingerbread person to show what things are not good in a friendship





Sources of support

Online support - the following organisations can provide advice and guidance for children and young people, many offer advice to parents/ carers as well.

Friendship specific support

- **Childline friendship support** - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/friends/friendships/#:~:text=%20But%20there%20are%20things%20that%20can%20help%3A,the%20honestly%20about%20how%20you%20feel.%20More%20>
- **Parenting science** - <https://www.parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends.html#:~:text=How%20to%20help%20kids%20make%20friends%3A%20%2010,things%20out%20on%20their%20own.%20More%20items...%20>
- **Wiki how** - <https://www.wikihow.com/Help-Shy-Kids-Make-Friends>
- **Very well family** - <https://www.verywellfamily.com/making-and-keeping-friends-2633627>
- **Kidscape** - <https://www.kidscape.org.uk/>
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General support

- **Young minds** - The UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health
<https://youngminds.org.uk/>
- **Kooth** - Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people
<https://www.kooth.com/>
- **Rise above** - Online mental health support for young people
<https://riseabove.org.uk/topic/my-mind/>
- **Samaritans** - <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- **The dock** - The dock is a new and different way for young people to find out about services that are here to help them in Swindon.
<https://thedockswindon.co.uk/>
- **NHS every mind matters** - <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>
- **The Mix** - Essential support for people under 25
<https://www.themix.org.uk/>
- **The Children's society** - Support for young people and their mental health
<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/young-peoples-mental-health>
- **Friends of STEP Facebook page**—Here you can find useful resources covering a variety of topics (including ADHD)
<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfStep>
- **Online safety information** - <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/>

Useful telephone numbers

TaMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools Service) - work with children and young people with emotional and mental health needs such as: anxiety, trauma, emotional distress, low mood and self harm. Tel—01793 463177

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) - Help children, young people and their families across Swindon, Wiltshire, Bath and North East Somerset who are experiencing more severe, complex and persistent mental health difficulties. Tel—01865 903422

Useful online videos to help with mental wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF7Ou43Vj6c>

Headspace meditation - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_yXe_6mYTA

A beginner's guide to meditation - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-kMJBWk9E0>

The social and emotional benefits of physical activity and exercise —

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNIOsNI-o60>