



Introduction

Welcome to the next issue in our 'keyworker series', where each month we focus on one of the eight domains of quality of life (QoL) and how you can support your key child through your weekly keyworker sessions.

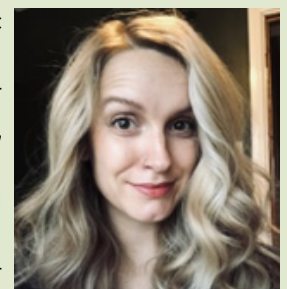
This issue focuses on **interpersonal relationships!**

Instead of focusing on 'fixing' or teaching 'social skills', research shows the importance of listening to autistic young people to support the development of safe, affirming relationships in ways that align with individual preferences.

Research Summary - Fox et al (2024)

This article brings together findings from 6 UK studies highlighting autistic children's own views about friendship. They identified key themes:

- Wanting friendship and connection with others, but often feeling isolated or misunderstood by non-autistic peers, describing experiences of rejection, masking, or struggling to connect.
- Defining relationships in terms of shared interests, kindness, and mutual respect, with many preferring 1-1 friendships and non-verbal connection.
- Key adults help make sense of situations. When adults listened, they felt safer and able to process interpersonal difficulties. Adults can help to deconstruct interactions and identify misunderstandings, without the child feeling blamed.



Dr Laura Fox

The Reality

1. Explore Individual Preferences

Remember not all children will want or need the same levels or types of relationship! What do they want/need?



2. Create Opportunities for Connection

Ask what they enjoy & invite peers to join structured, interest-based activities.



3. Foster Understanding & Repair

Explain different needs to pupils using inclusive language but help them recognise and safely respond to conflict behaviours.



4. Break Things Down

Clear up misunderstandings by talking through relationships together.



5. Model Consent, Boundaries & Respect

Ask permission to join an activity, show how to respectfully disagree - think about how we present ourselves as adults in school!



Further Reading & Links

[Experiences of friendships among autistic children in UK schools](#)

[Understanding Relationships - Ambitious About Autism](#)

[LAT Liberty Quality of Life Home](#)