

Being a Friend Online

It was a rainy day, and Allie was hanging out with her best friend Susan. They didn't have much to do, and Susan told Allie, "I'm getting bored. Your house is kind of boring."

Allie did not want Susan to get bored, so she suggested they look on the iPad. Allie's parents said that was okay as long as it was only for one hour.

Susan knew how to do lots of things Allie did not know about on the tablet! She showed Allie some things that Allie had heard her parents talk about, like Facebook and Pinterest. She also showed Allie ways to watch different videos that some of their classmates posted and how to look at their pictures on Instagram.

Allie was starting to feel like Susan knew everything, and she didn't know anything! She wanted Susan to see that she was cool, too.

Then, Allie noticed that their friend Lyn had an Instagram account. Allie could not even believe it. Lyn was usually the last to do everything. "Let's look at Lyn's pictures," Allie suggested to Susan.

They found lots of pictures of Lyn doing silly things with her family, making food that looked gross to Allie, and even just celebrating holidays. Then, Allie noticed that there was a place to write comments about the pictures.

Allie grabbed the iPad from Susan. "What an ugly bunch of freaks," she typed. She figured it did not matter what she said, since Lyn would never know who had written the comment.

Susan grabbed the iPad back before Allie had the chance to post the comment. "What are you doing, Allie?" she exclaimed. "Lyn is part of our community! How do you think she would feel after reading a comment like that?"

Allie thought about it. She felt her skin crawl, imagining Lyn's feelings. "You're right," she said to Susan, "the Internet is for everyone." She looked at her friend and spoke honestly, "I was just feeling left out, and I wanted you to think I was cool."

"Fitting in is complicated when it comes to the Internet," Susan said, "But sometimes I ask myself, 'How would I feel if someone said that to me in person?' Then I can think about how it would feel to read a comment like that on-line."

Allie tried out Susan’s question. She knew that if someone called pictures of her family ugly, it would make her feel sad and angry. She started to understand that how she acted on the Internet was one more way she could be a part of a strong community.

“Do you want to write a comment?” Susan asked Allie. The girls thought together, and they typed, “Nice pictures!” Then they signed off for the day.