Friendship Group Guidance:
Introductions.

Using the information from the 'This is Me' pictures from the first week, introduce ourselves and the person sitting next to us with a mention of our likes or dislikes,
Eg: 'I'm Martin and this is Mrs Bishop, and she likes..............................'
After the first week see if people can remember without looking at the pictures.
Variation: 'I'm Sally' (two claps, either at the same time or, if this is difficult, just after) and this is Khateja (three claps) followed by the group saying 'She’s Sally (two claps) and this is Khateja (three claps)
Or:
'I’m Franky’ (two elbow flaps) 'and this is Mrs Higginbottom' (six elbow flaps) followed by the group repeating and elbow flapping, etc.

Initial Introductions: Make a set of 26 cards with a list of positive adjectives for each initial letter on one side and the letter of the alphabet on the other. Use these cards as prompts to introduce each other and the person sitting next to us. (eg I'm Sara and I'm Sweet and Shy, this is Billy, he’s Bouncy and Beautiful.)
Friendship Group Guidance:
Rules.

1. This is a friendly group. We do not criticise one another.

2. We do not compete. If someone is stuck, we help.

3. Things that are talked about in the group are confidential. The only time this rule may be broken is if something that someone says makes the adults think they might be in danger, or could be a danger to someone else.

4. If people need a bit of time to calm down, its OK to drop out of the group for a few minutes.

5. If someone is spoiling the group, the adults will ask them to leave.
Friendship Group Guidance:
Warm ups.

**Zoom, zoom, eek.** The children sit in an inward facing circle. One child says “Zoom!” to a child on his or her right, that child turns their head to look at the person on their right and says, “Zoom!” This action is repeated until someone says, “Eek!” which reverses the direction. (Give each child a fixed number of ‘eek’s)

**Sausages.** The group members in turn ask each other a question - any question. The answer is always ‘sausages’. The group members try not to laugh!

**The Bees are Buzzing.** Each member of the group takes it in turns to say ‘The bees are buzzing’ to the next person in the group, using a different tone of voice, and conveying a different emotion, every time. (eg, annoyed, tired, happy, excited etc.)

**Clap this way.** Play a piece of music and get the group members to clap to the rhythm. Then call out instructions
‘Clap above your head’
‘Clap on the table’
‘Clap to the right’
‘Clap to the left’
‘Clap with the person sitting next to you’
Be aware of sensory sensitivities – noise and touch.
Then let each group member have a turn at giving instructions

**Silent tambourine.** A tambourine is passed around the circle without making a noise!

**Wink murder.** A member of the class is chosen to be the detective and leaves the room while a murderer is chosen from those left. The detective returns to the classroom. The murderer has to discreetly wink at his victims who fall dead in their chairs. The detective has to discover who the murderer is. (If the detective starts to falter, someone should help by giving him or her a whispered clue.)
Listen and do. Read ‘We’re going on a bear hunt’ or another children’s book with repeated refrains. Each member of the group has a cue card with an action they should perform on it. They should perform this action every time ‘their’ phrase comes up. Eg
We’re going on a bear hunt - creeping action with head between shoulders
We’re going to catch a big one - hands wide apart to indicate big
What a beautiful day - big sunshine action with a smile
We’re not scared - shake head and hand
Uh oh - hands up, shocked expression
An adult reads the story and the group members perform their actions.
If they enjoy this activity, they can swap cards and repeat

Talking round. Group members take turns to complete a sentence stem. If children are new to this type of activity, keep the sentence simple - for example 'My favourite food is . . . ’ with older children, or those more familiar with this sort of activity, try to encourage imaginative thinking by using rounds such as 'The most exciting place to visit would be . . . '<br>The children can use a talking object for his game if you prefer. This is a small object that can be easily held in a hand, such as a painted wooden egg. The talking object is held by the child whilst they speak and then passed on to the next child. The rule is that only the child who is holding the object may speak. (Discourage any negative responses to the choices children might make during rounds.)<br>Some groups can extend this activity by adding a new word on to the ones used before, eg
’My favourite food is pizza’
’My favourite food is pizza and fried eggs’
’My favourite food is pizza and fried eggs and strawberry yoghurt’ etc

Five pins. The adult selects two group members as pins. They stand up. At the command “pins down” either or both pins sit down, but they must be replaced by other group so that there are always two pins standing. If there are more two, some group members must sit down again. This game is good for cooperation and collaboration.

Friendship Group Guidance:
Core activities.
Friendly conversations. The adults role play a conversation between two people. One tells the other that her dog has died and she is very sad. The other adult starts talking about what a brilliant weekend she has had, constantly interrupting and showing no empathy. The children are asked to comment. Highlight that in a friendly conversation people try to show an interest in what the other people are saying and show that they understand the other person’s feelings.

Smoothers and blockers. Make a collection of conversation cards, e.g.

Smoothers (which smooth a conversation.)
• 'Hello, how are you?' - respond briefly then ask how the other person is.
• 'This weekend I went......' - respond by asking what it was like.
• 'What did you do on your holidays?' - respond by talking briefly about your holiday then asking about their holiday
• 'My favourite food is.......' Respond by saying that you don't like that, you prefer.... And then asking what else the other person likes to eat.

Blockers (which block a conversation)
• 'Hello, how are you' - respond by going on and on about how poorly you are.
• 'This weekend I went......' Tell them where you went and go on about it.
• 'What did you do on your holidays?' Tell them and go on about it.
• 'My favourite food is.......' Say yeugh, how disgusting, no one in their right mind would eat that, how stupid etc

Each group member takes a card in turn and role plays the situation with another person. The other group members say whether it is a 'smoother' or a 'blocker'. Start to draw up a list of smoothers for friendly conversations - this can be added to as the weeks go on.

Assertiveness. Make some role play cards describing a situation to which a child might respond passively, assertively or aggressively: for example 'A friend wants to borrow a pen and she lost the last one you lent her'. Staff should pick a card and then role play the three different responses. Discuss what is likely to happen. Each child then picks up a card, reads out the situation (or asks someone to help if reading is a problem), and then role plays a response, with an adult or another child as partner, being
either passive, assertive or aggressive. Remind them beforehand that during an aggressive situation they do not touch the other person. The group should then guess which style they are using.

**Being friendly 1:** Make friendly/unfriendly cards and give one to each player. Ask them to say whether the action described is friendly or unfriendly, and why.

Examples: telling someone they look nice; telling someone they are fat; lending someone a pencil; borrowing something and not giving it back; inviting someone to sit with you at dinner time, laughing at someone’s new haircut, telling someone loudly that their trouser zip is undone; telling someone quietly that their trouser zip is undone; telling someone that a label is sticking up at the back of their shirt; listening quietly when someone tells you about a sad experience etc.

**Being friendly 2:** Ask the players to think of a friend and to write down three things that they like about them. NB some players might say that they have no friends. In this case ask them to think of a family member, a teacher or a member of staff that they like and to write down three things that they like about them.

**Teasing.** Many young people with autism find it hard to distinguish friendly, everyday teasing from deliberate cruelty. Make a series of cards describing situations and ask the group to discuss them and decide whether the intention is friendly or not. If its difficult to decide, discuss some of the other cues you might need to use, eg facial expression, body language etc. If the group members find this difficult, it will indicate that they need a readily available mentor or buddy at school who is willing to help them with this.

Example cards:

- Susan isn’t very good at catching balls. In a PE lesson Mary chooses Susan as a partner and deliberately throws balls too hard and fast for her to catch. She laughs at her every time she misses.
- John knows a lot about dinosaurs and he likes to talk about them. One day Bill tells him a new dinosaur has been discovered, its called ‘Ohnonotanotherasaurus.’
- Sally has new sunglasses which she wears on her way to school one day. Some girls point and laugh at her, saying, ‘Who does she think she is, Victoria Beckham?’
**Being a rule policeman.** Some people with autism might be a stickler for the rules, and insist on telling the teacher if they see another child breaking the rules. Make up a set of cards of rules which you should tell about (eg someone is being a bully or is behaving dangerously), and rules which you don't need to tell about if you see them being broken (eg someone isn't sitting up properly, someone is wearing jewellery, someone is whispering in class when they are supposed to be being quiet). Discuss each card in turn and decide if it is a good idea to tell or not to tell. Explain that some children will get upset if another child 'tells' on them.

Friendship Group Guidance:
Friendly Finishes.
**Helping each other.** Play Kim’s game (objects on a tray). As it gets harder and harder to remember, when someone gets stuck another person whispers the answer to them.

**Everybody is different 1.** Ask the group members if they are in a category that you call out. For example, everybody with brown eyes, everybody who had toast for breakfast, everybody who watches Eastenders. Then take turns thinking of a category.

**Everybody is different 2.** Bring in a number of strongly smelling things in lidded containers. Write down people’s responses to them on a chart. Talk about how everybody has different likes and dislikes in food, smells, music, games etc and that this is OK. (This activity can also be done with different foods.)

**Word association.** Someone says a word, the person next to them says another word associated with the first one. If they can’t think of a word, someone helps them with a whisper. (The adults step in if rude words are used!)

**Pass the stick.** A stick or wooden spoon is passed round in turn. The person with the stick performs an action with it and the others guess what it is they are doing. (Adults may wish to ban weaponry!)

**Pass the Gesture.** One person makes a gesture towards the person on the right hand side. The gesture goes round the group until it reaches the person on the left of the original group member. This person then chooses a new gesture and it gets passed round. This game can be played with facial expressions instead of gestures.

**What am I doing, how do I feel?** Make some mime cards, (eg climbing a mountain, looking for a favourite toy, getting ice cream out of the freezer, getting a good (or bad) mark for homework.) Each group member takes a card and mimes the action. The other group members guess what is being mimed, and then everyone discusses what that person might be feeling and how that feeling might be expressed.

**Chinese drawings.** A shape is drawn on the back of one child who then has to pass it onto the next person. In turn the shape gets passed around the
circle. (Emphasise that the aim is to concentrate and cooperate as a group). If one child feels the shape differently that is not 'wrong', just interesting. NB: some children with autism have hypersensitive responses to touch and may not want to play this game.

**Spin the bottle:** Make some prompt cards which can cue the group members to say something about themselves, eg best score in a computer game, best holiday, pets, favourite clothes etc. The group members take turns to spin a bottle inside their circle. When the bottle comes to rest, whoever the neck of the bottle is facing says a sentence about themselves. If they unable to think of anything to say, they take a prompt card to help them.

**Who can think of something?** An adult asks 'who can think of something.......? Something furry, something loud, something scary, something big, something hard, something cold etc. The group members answer and then have a turn in order. (Use the helping whisper to make sure that everyone gets a turn at answering.)

**What's in my head 1?** One group member has a picture of an object on her knee, where people can't see it. They describe the object using shape, size, colour, etc, whilst the others try to guess what it is. If they are having trouble guessing, they then describe what the object is used for. Each player takes turns at describing an object for the others.

**What's in my head 2?** Each person has a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. One player has a simple collection of shapes on his sheet, which he keeps hidden from the others. He describes the shapes to the others whilst they draw it, eg 'Start with a circle, bisect it with a vertical line, draw a small triangle at the right end of the line' etc

**Friendship groups booklist**

Most of these books were written with typically developing children in mind. To make the activities described appropriate for stress-free, autism friendly groups it will be necessary to adapt them to take out the competitive element – remember that many children and young people with autism will have
experienced huge amounts of failure in their social lives by the time they have been at school for a few years. Games where a winner has the next turn should be adapted so that the next turns are taken strictly in order.

Remember also that the aim of some of the activities described in these books is ‘normalisation’, whereas the aim of a friendship group should be to give the players the skills they need in order to make friends, and to create a stress free and enjoyable place in the school week where they can have a good time in the company of others.

Penny Barratt et al Developing Pupils Social Communication Skills Practical Resources David Fulton Publishers

Jeanette Mc Afee Navigating the Social World, a curriculum for Individuals with Asperger’s syndrome and High Functioning Autism Future Horizons

Shay Mc Connan Interpersonal Communication From the ‘Your Choice’ series, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd

Ursula Cornish and Fiona Ross Social skills Training for adolescents with General Moderate Learning Difficulties Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Jenny Moseley and Helen Sonnet 101 games for Social Skills. LDA

Alison Schroeder Socially Speaking LDA

Jed E. Baker Social Skills Training APC

Alex Kelly Talkabout and Talkabout Activities Speechmark

Cherrie Domain and Lorraine Hirst Success into Secondary Lucky Duck