

Creating Lasting Adult Friendships

What to Know

There are many benefits of lifelong friendships, but as you get older, it might be harder to meet new friends and create deep, lasting friendships. It might be challenging to find time to nurture and maintain your adult friendships.

Researchers report that healthy friendships support happiness and physical health. According to a recent study, strong adult friendships are linked to a boosted immune system, increased longevity, reduced stress, improved memory, better heart health, and a positive sense of well-being.

Your friendships will remain strong and healthy if you are a good friend. Try these suggestions to nurture your friendships:

Be a safe space. Give your friends the freedom to express themselves, allowing them to share and vent without judgment. Try not to give unsolicited advice or offer solutions to their problems. Check in to see if your friend simply wants to talk about what is bothering them.

Be present. Make the time you spend together count. Put away your phone and avoid distractions. Ask questions and use active listening skills (like good eye contact).

Be kind. Small acts of kindness add up. Tell your friend how much they mean to you and celebrate their wins. Remember important dates with a text, card, or gift. Avoid criticism and negativity.

Be vulnerable to increase intimacy and deepen connections. Shared feelings and experiences bring friends closer. Show your friends you trust them by talking openly and freely about what you think and how you feel.

Be reliable. Your friendships are strengthened when friends know they can count on you. If you constantly cancel plans or share their secrets, the relationships will suffer. Show up on time and do what you say you will do.

Curb competition. Avoid comparing yourself to your friends. Instead, lift them up by celebrating their success and achievements.

You can also nurture other types of friendships in your life.

- **Work friends.** Strengthen relationships with co-workers by greeting them in a friendly way, supporting them, and going to lunch together.
- **Casual acquaintances/neighbors.** Even if you do not know someone well, ask them how they are doing and congratulate them on their accomplishments. Send a quick text or message through social media.
- **Friends you do not see often.** Reach out more often. Plan a call or visit to catch up.

If you can use some help with building, strengthening, and maintaining your friendships, follow these suggestions.

1. Let friends know you are busy – without making excuses. If you are experiencing an unusually busy period, clearly let friends know so they do not take your lack of communication personally. Let them know when you will connect again. For example, you might say, “I’m overwhelmed with a work deadline. I miss you! Can we plan a coffee catchup in two weeks?” You might tag them in a fun social media post to let them know you are thinking about them.

2. Include friendship appreciation on your to-do list. Examine your schedule and see if you can make more time for friends. Friendships often fail because of lack of effort, so schedule “friendship check-ins” into your calendar.

3. Extend invitations. If you are overly busy, explore how to meet with a friend while completing your to-do list. Perhaps you can meet at the gym for a workout, schedule a pedicure together, or spend your lunch break together.

4. Be realistic and empathic about your friends’ schedules and responsibilities. You are probably also busy, so try to understand if your friends are busy and overwhelmed. If your friends always reach out first, acknowledge their efforts and thank them. See if you can even out how often you reach out, even if you just send a quick text.

5. Remember life events. Write friendship reminders in your calendar and set alerts. Write down birthdays, new job responsibilities, and important appointments or deadlines. Check in to celebrate or see how things went.

6. Share openly and listen. Friendships deepen when there is vulnerability, shared empathy, and self-disclosure. Avoid responding with strong statements that make them feel judged. People sometimes just want to be heard and understood.

7. Regularly do small acts of kindness. Let your friends know you appreciate them by making simple gestures like buying them lunch, giving them flowers, or sending a card.

8. Focus on quality, not quantity. Having a few close friends with whom you feel a strong connection can be more fulfilling than having a large circle you struggle to keep up with. Also, have friends who fill different roles in your life.

9. Identify why maintaining friendships is challenging for you. If you struggle to make time for friendships, you may need to revisit your priorities. Before you can nurture your relationships, determine why it has been difficult in the past.

10. Actively prioritize friendship. Focusing more on friendship might require a mindset shift around your priorities. For example, you might set firmer boundaries between work and personal time or identify activities that help you reduce stress and overwhelm.

11. Get creative. Spending time with friends does not have to be time-consuming. Can you fit any of these activities into your schedule?

- meet up for a walk before work
- grab coffee together before work
- meet for lunch
- do a volunteer activity or “fun run” together

12. Note how you feel when you spend time with friends. Pay attention to your mood when you are with friends and compare how you feel when you neglect friendships. Is there a difference? Spending time with friends can greatly improve emotional well-being, so keep this in mind when you are tempted to cancel or re-schedule.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Are you a good friend? Why or why not?

Is making friends hard for you? Why or why not?

Is it difficult for you to maintain friendships? Why? Explain.

If you struggle to make time for friendships, review your priorities. Why do you fail to make time for friends? Is work overwhelming? Does parenting take up most of your time? Are you just too stressed to consider adding another thing to your calendar? Be honest.

Write down one solution that can help you address this problem.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

If you struggle with making and keeping friends, how motivated are you to address this problem?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
