

Building Skills That Enhance Relationships



Everyone brings special qualities to friendships — qualities that make friendships richer and stronger.

The following is a list of some of these qualities:

- Being independent and self-sufficient
- Being positive, upbeat and warm
- Talking about others in a positive way
- Being honest and dependable
- Being respectful of the other person's feelings
- Accepting your individual differences
- Listening closely without interrupting
- Giving the other person plenty of “space”

Activity

Make a list of the strengths you bring to your friendships or to the people in your life, including any from the list above. Give yourself credit for these positive attributes.

Creating Change

List the things you would like to work on that you think would make it easier for you to make and keep friends. Acknowledging that you want to improve and reminding yourself of this desire from time to time will create the personal change you are seeking. Ask your family members and friends to support you in these efforts. You may want to ask a health care professional for additional advice and support. Self-help books will give you ideas for creating this change. Of most importance is your determination to change. Remember that everyone has areas that need improvement. Change takes time.

Activity

Think of a time when you created some change in your life that made your life better.

Life Circumstances that Make Friendships Difficult

Factors over which neither you nor the other person have any control can make it difficult to be friends. You may want to be friends or closer friends, but one or a combination of these issues may get in the way:

- Illness
- Distance
- Stress
- Overwork
- Fear
- Financial problems or poverty
- Differences in expectations
- Extreme differences in interests
- Lack of transportation

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It is important to acknowledge these difficulties, but don't give up on the friendship if you don't want to. These factors are challenging, but not impossible. Some factors must simply be accepted — such as distance, and others you can work on changing — such as fear or overwork. For example, a woman in her fifties has been very close friends most of her life with a woman she first met at camp when she was a child. Now they live in different states and their busy lives keep them from being together as much as they would like. They keep their friendship strong through weekly e-mails.

Activity

What is a life circumstance that makes it difficult to keep up with one of your friendships or with a person you know well? Using all your creativity, write five possible ways to resolve this difficulty. If you can't think of enough ideas, ask a friend for suggestions. Then try doing one or more of these things.

Is This Friendship a Good Idea?

Sometimes it is better to avoid getting closely involved with a person or to end a friendship. You may want to stop being friends with a person if they:

- Share personal information about others
- Violate your boundaries
- Put others or you down
- Tease, ridicule, taunt, “badmouth” friends and family
- Are clingy or very needy
- Ask questions that make you feel uncomfortable
- Ask for risky favors
- Engage in illegal behavior
- Are physically, emotionally or sexually abusive

Before you end the friendship, you may want to talk about the troubling behavior. If the person stops doing it, you may be able to continue your friendship. To help you decide if you want to end a friendship, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this person always this way or just this way once in a while?
- Is this person having a hard time right now that might be affecting their behavior?

- Are you having a hard time right now that may be affecting your feelings and the way you see things?
- Do you often enjoy this friendship or do you sometimes feel hurt?

You may be tempted to pursue a relationship with someone even though the person treats you or others badly. However, most people agree it is better not to have a certain friend than to have a person treat you badly. If the things another person says to you or does to you make you feel hurt and the person won't stop doing those kinds of things, he or she is not your friend. It is always your choice whether or not to be friends with another person. Reach out to others for information and advice, but the final decision should always be yours.

Activity

Write down a goal for yourself about making and keeping friends. Write down the steps you will take to reach your goal. Keep this information where you will see it and remember to continue to work on it. When you have reached your goal, give yourself a “pat on the back” and then set another goal for yourself.

Set a small daily goal for yourself each day that will help you make new friends or keep your friendships strong such as:

- Calling one friend or someone you know well
- Doing something nice for someone else
- Attending a support group
- Sending a friend or someone else you know a card or an e-mail

