

Friendship

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Friendship. The dictionary says:

Friend (friend) noun.

1. A person whom one knows, likes and trusts.
2. A person whom one is allied in a struggle or cause; Comrade.
3. One who supports, sympathizes with, or patronizes a group.
4. An acquaintance

The dictionary makes one small omission. It doesn't speak of the years that a friendship endures, the laughter that fills the air when friends are together, the support, understanding and comfort a friend can offer or the anguish you cannot escape from when a friend is dying. The dictionary, I'm afraid cannot begin to define the word: Friend.



So then what is this magic called friendship?

Is there a magic wand that silently transforms you and those special people on a journey into what sometimes can be a lifelong relationship?

Is it mutual admiration, common interests, the need to be a friend?

Or it is just an enduring tie that bonds you together, allows you to almost think as one and gives you one of life's greatest joys. Friends are precious jewels. Treat them as such. Enjoy them! Celebrate them! And never take them for granted.

(From www.paradisewaits.com/Ties.html)

When A Friend Dies

We've talked about the value of friendship. What about when we lose a friend to death? Our friend may die after a long illness or unexpectedly due to an accident or even commit suicide. How do we react and how do we cope? Though rationally we all realize the possibility of losing a friend, in reality we expect friendship to last forever.

When a friend dies, sometimes people disregard the value of friendship. They may minimize your loss since the person was not a family member or a significant other. This lack of acknowledgement of the gravity of your loss may complicate your bereavement. For example, there is usually not a bereavement policy at work for death of a friend. Society does not offer the same kinds of solace that we offer when it's a family member or a significant other.

What do you do? You have lost someone with whom you shared only certain things. Perhaps you knew them longer than your spouse. You shared common interests with them, private jokes, travel, history, joys and tribulations. They knew you when you had an Afro, a beard, fishnet stockings, when you were deciding whether to marry your spouse. Who do you talk to now? There is a terrible void.



First of all acknowledge the magnitude of the loss. It is not “just a friend” She/he is part of you. You will go through the “normal” stages of grief:

- Shock, denial, disbelief
- Anger
- Depression
- Bargaining
- Acceptance

Remember, each person grieves in a different way. Whatever you feel, is normal for you. If it was a suicide, you may have complicated feelings you need help with. If the person did not follow medical advice, perhaps you are angry and guilty and you feel that anger. However, do not let people devalue the friendship or the loss of it. Reach out for help. Take care of yourself, be patient with yourself and do not isolate from others who can support you.

Though the following is addressed to men, those of us who have boys or men in our life will benefit as well.

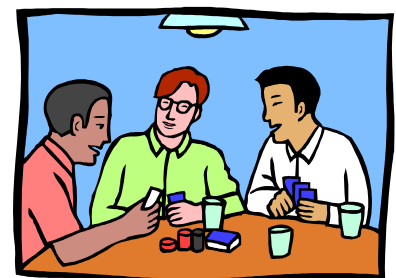
Dear Men:

Do you have friends? Really close friends? Friends for life? I know men who come to a startling revelation they have no friends. They have a lot of acquaintances, but other than their girlfriends/wives, they have no close friends. You often hear the statement that women fare much better than men when a spouse dies because they have friends.

Why is this? Many men say they are just too busy, too busy working and raising a family to make and keep friends. Some people feel that men are too out of touch with their feelings to make friends. True intimacy is seen as something for women. This is a loss for men, for as we stated the first week, friendships are one of life’s greatest joys and bring tremendous support.

So, if you have friends, good for you, value them and keep them. If you don’t read on:

First of all, we can’t gauge men’s friendships by female friendships. If two men don’t talk on the phone every day and pour out their hearts, it doesn’t mean their friendship is less legitimate. Men friends do more together, but talk less than female friends. Yet that doesn’t make male friendship any less remarkable or important. They may seem more superficial, but when a friend is going through a tough time, they are right there to give support. Male friendships often start or get reinforced in transitional periods in life - becoming a husband or a father, getting a divorce or dealing with a parent dying. They can take place at work or while involved in sports or recreational activities. In order for men to develop relationships, they have to be willing to do the following things:



Disclose - You need to open up and lay aside the public persona you present. This does mean risk, because rejection is always possible. But remember, the age-old adage, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Even if a given relationship or attempt does not work out, you can learn a great deal about yourself in the process of trying to make it work that might help you in

other relationships. Women may express their deepest feeling by talking but men find other ways, such as a look or a nod or doing something for their friend.

Reciprocity - If a friendship is to prosper, you need to reciprocate, especially in the beginning of forming a relationship. If the other person invites you somewhere or shares something personal, you need to do so, too.

Maintenance - Getting to know another person can be difficult and doesn't happen as quickly or as simply as we would like. Take the time to make plans and commitments to spend time together. Having a friend is like growing a garden. Each needs attention and nurturing. And like a garden, the rewards of friendship are bountiful!

Friendships meet important needs in people's lives. It can be one of the major avenues of self-exploration in life. Friendship provides major support in dealing with life's challenges. Friendship can be a buffer against loneliness. Research suggests that women's friendships could help explain why women live longer than men.

So what happens when a friendship ends? Many people expect their friends will always be there. They expect friendship to last forever. And of course they don't. Friendships end for a variety of reasons and how they end effects how we feel about it and how we cope.

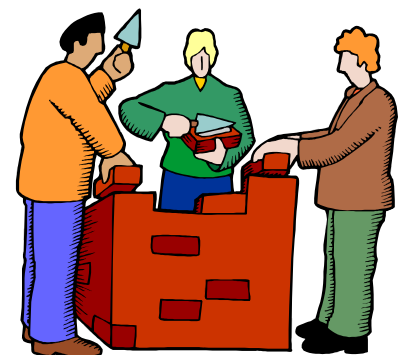
Some friendships end due to a change in personality or lifestyle and friends drift apart. Two women could be friends while they are stay at home Moms and then one goes back to work and the friendship fades away with time. Perhaps one person moves away and the friendship slowly loses importance and finally disappears. It could be a gradual process and though sad, may not be a major disruption.

However, there are friendships that end due to a disagreement or conflict. This can be painful and disruptive. Usually it is a result of three reasons:

- Unexpressed expectations
- Undelivered communication
- And/or thwarted attention
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Friendships can become abusive. It's important not to ignore if you are feeling caught in an abusive friendship. You may need to end the relationship. Whether you are initiating the "breakup" or you are the recipient, it is best to deal with it in an open way. If you are the "dumpee" its normal to feel confused, embarrassed, even angry when a friend just walks away. You may feel shame stemming from the perception you have been easily discarded. If you are the "dumper" talking to your friend is the best way to end the relationship. But if you can't face this, try writing a letter.

Regardless of why, when, or how friendships end, there is always some pain from the loss to absorb. It is important to grieve and feel the pain fully if the relationship cannot be maintained. Reach out for help if needed.



Work Friendships

As most of you are receiving this at work, it would be remiss to not talk about work friendships. You spend more than half your life at work. But what role should friendship play in the workplace? Should you have friends at work or keep things business like and avoid friendships? I admit I have a bias towards having work friendships, as I have met some of my closest friends at work. This week we will talk about the benefits and challenges of work friendships.

Handled carefully, workplace friendships can enrich our lives and boost our careers. Even in the best jobs, a good office ally can keep you sane. If you're having a problem with your supervisor, a co-worker or a customer, patient, client, it's your work friends you can turn to for advice and emotional support. Our work colleagues can often be a proxy family. These are people who really support you over the tough patches. They can create a meal train for a coworker who is ill or support someone going through a personal loss. Workplace friendships also make you be a better worker. It can make your job more enjoyable, even enhancing your productivity and creativity. Work friends exchange more and higher quality information and push each other to succeed.

So why would you not have friends at work? One reason is when workplace friendships go awry, the impact can be costly. Perhaps they have information that you have shared confidentially which can hurt your career or expose your vulnerability. At the very least, you cannot escape this person, you work with them! That same sense of family can create a double bind. Perhaps that friend becomes too needy and wants your support constantly and you have a job to get done! You need to then be clear with that individual about needing to get the work done.

Due to the pros and cons of developing friendships at work, you need to be more cautious about deciding whether to enter into a workplace friendship. Once you do, keep in mind, that like other friendships, you may need to talk about conflicts, or changes in roles or other issues that come up. Make sure you have other friendships outside of work as a safety net. If you consider all of the above, there is no reason you can't reap the benefits of work friendships.

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