

The Benefits of Adult Friendships



An old poem tells us to, “Make new friends but keep the old, the new are silver the old are gold” (Parry, n.d.). Researchers are finding that friendships are worth even more than silver or gold, in fact, there are many benefits associated with adult friendships. In a study published by the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, researchers note, “Incorporating social support and connections is critical for overall health and for healthy habits to be sustainable” (Martino, et al, 2017). These same researchers found evidence that social support (e.g., friendships), help people maintain a variety of health factors such as blood sugar control, heart health, a healthy body mass index, cancer survival improvement, and overall mental health improvement. Another study published in The American Journal of Psychiatry, concluded that “social connection is the strongest protective factor for depression”(Choi, et al, 2020). The benefits of friendship also increase your sense of belonging and purpose, contribute to improved self-worth and confidence, help you cope with traumatic events in your life, and increase happiness while reducing stress.

Adults often find it more difficult to develop new friendships

or maintain existing friendships. Responsibilities such as work or taking care of a family may take priority. Additionally, friendships change as people change interests or move away. However, you are never too old, and it is never too late to reach out to old friends or make new friends. Friendship takes effort but given the benefits of friendship, the extra work can be worth it. Following the suggestions below from the Mayo Clinic may help as you seek to nurture new and existing friendships:

1. Be kind. This is the core of successful relationships. You get back what you put in so make certain what you give is positive and kind. Try expressing gratitude for the small things, say “thank you” when you are thankful or appreciative of your friend or something kind they did.

2. Be a good listener. Let your friend know you are interested in their life. Show interest through eye contact and body language. Try to listen and ask clarifying questions, but don't seek to respond with advice unless it is asked for directly.

3. Open up. Sharing about your life can deepen connection and build intimacy with your friend. It shows them that they hold a special place in your life. Try expressing your feelings with “I” statements to be vulnerable and build connection.

4. Show that you can be trusted. Be dependable, reliable, and responsible. When your friends share confidences with you, keep it confidential. Be sure to follow through on commitments and be on time when you plan get together.

5. Make yourself available. Forging friendships takes time, including time spent together. Try to see new friends regularly and check in with them in-between times. Try texting or calling your friends when you think about them just to talk and be available to them.

References

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