

FRIENDSHIPS

Friends are those rare people who ask how we are and then wait to hear the answer. Ed Cunningham

You don't need evolutionary psychologists to tell you that strong social bonds – friends – are vital for your survival, but in any event they have. Researchers have found that when we are with people we have positive social connection with, our bodies release chemicals that aid our health, and that when we are lonely our bodies turn on chemicals that inhibit our physical health. Literally, we can die of loneliness. Friendships are important.

Friends keep you resilient, lift mood, increase success and productivity, fuels innovation, increase levels of persistence and give you a whole host of other benefits. We all need friends, but friendship takes effort, it takes being vulnerable, it takes conscious thought, it takes sacrifice, it takes generosity, it takes curiosity. Here are some ideas you can put into action:

- Choose one day in which to do 5 acts of kindness that you would not normally do. For example help a stranger (make sure you stay within the bounds of safety), do a chore for someone else, buy someone a treat, give a donation to a charity.
- Make a list of all those people who are your friends. Next to each name identify the ritual or rituals that support you getting together with this person on a regular basis (e.g. go to the gym together, have breakfast once a month).
- If you have friends who you value that you do not have a ritual for getting together on a regular basis have a chat with that friend about ways you can make time to spend with them regularly.
- Challenge yourself to find out something about three friends that you did not know.
- Send one friend a card to congratulate them on something that has recently happened in their life e.g. a new job, a promotion, completion of a project, an addition to their family (child, niece/nephew, grandchild), just looking great, or being nice to someone.
- Give your friends a hug when you meet them. If this action takes you too far outside your comfort zone then shake their hand and hold it for a bit longer than you normally would, ensuring you smile and look them in the eyes as you do.
- Share with a friend something you feel vulnerable about.
- Decide to love yourself and your life. People want to be around other people who shine.
- Make a list of people you have met who you found interesting, gather your courage and invite them to catch up with you.
- Say YES to all party invitations and networking functions, you never know who you will meet.
- Do something you have never done before where you will meet new people and decide ahead of the event to have a great time.
- Forgive people their humanity. Don't let people walk all over you, but also allow people some grace.
- Host dinner parties or become someone who organises things that people can come to.
- Don't be afraid to mix your friends even though they come from different parts of your life. Being able to introduce your friends to new people is a great way to inspire them.
- Be generous in spirit and specifically and generously acknowledge your friends often for the contribution they make to your life.