

Taking Stock of Your Friendships

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I believe a person's life is largely defined by the bonds they have made with the people around them, be it siblings, parents, children, co-workers, or friends, the relationships and connections formed with those around us are very important. These bonds can function to make us better people, and help sustain us, or can be problematic and become a source of negativity. Sometimes we need to analyze our relationships, and specifically our friendships, to make sure they are meeting our needs.

Have your friendships grown with you? Are your friends still meeting your "friendship requirements"? A major life change, such as a marriage, new child, or move may have put you on the path to reflection. Maybe a change in your friends' behavior prompted the evaluation—did she stop calling or inviting you out? Maybe she started saying or doing things that hurt your feelings and you suspect her actions are intentional. Whatever the circumstance, if you feel you are being treated differently, cannot understand why, and do not like it, it may be time to look closely at your friendship.

As we get older and more stubborn, it can be hard to make new friends. For many of us, choosing to let a friendship go comes with the high probability that it will not be replaced. When facing a shrinking friend circle, reevaluating friendships becomes even more difficult. Although hanging onto a current friendship may seem like an easier alternative to dealing with issues, addressing a problem and moving on is always better. Whether with a romantic partner or friend, relationship inventory is important. It may be even more important with friends, as they often stand the test of time better than romantic relationships.

When your inner circle shrinks, you might realize that the friendships formed in your youth were not attributable to common interests or shared goals. Gravitating towards those who were around you, simply because they were there, was a natural way to make friends. Your friendship could have been relevant and worthwhile at the time, however, as you grow and really discover who you are as a person, the realization that your friendship was not built on much substance may make it harder to maintain. A person you once were comfortable sharing most things with, you might not trust with your feelings anymore. Someone you once could talk too openly, about everything and anything, may become the person you feel is judging you most.

Legitimately, you both could have grown in different directions. People change and the relationships surrounding them do as well. This is not to say you will no longer be friends with your girl from the 3rd grade; it might just be time for a different type of friendship with her. For better or worse, things do happen for a reason and as you go through life and realize things about yourself and the world around you, remember that having a network of supportive people in your corner is something everyone should have in their arsenal. Life is too tricky to navigate without a support system!

Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of your friendships:

1. **Do not ignore signs of a friendship heading in the wrong direction.** Those are your reevaluation indicators. Brushing things under the rug only leads to more complications. Address the issues early by starting with a simple conversation (in the medium of your choosing) and going from there. The worse thing you can do is let something that bothers you fester into anger and discontentment.
2. **Leave a friendship paper trail.** Make a list of everyone you have considered a friend over the past few years and rank where your relationship with them stands. Are you happy with the relationship? Maybe you do not talk to someone as much as you used to but you actually prefer it that way. Be honest with yourself.

3. **Make a goal for each friend.** What do you hope to accomplish with each friendship? Do you want to spend more time with a particular person? Is there someone you think is cool but you have not invested the time in getting to know better? Make the necessary steps to achieve your friendship goals.
4. **Different friends have different purposes.** You can have hang out friends, workout friends, book club friends, friends you travel with, and bare-your-soul to friends. The same person does not need to fulfill all of those roles and having different people for each category can be quite advantageous.
5. **Think about how YOU have changed and how that has contributed to the changes in your friendships (and other parts of your life).** If your life changes make you happy and you want to continue on that path, do not hesitate to shape your life in positive ways as changes in your relationships will follow suit.
6. **When a friendship needs to end, people are not always honest enough to express their feelings.** Getting used to having certain people around is normal, therefore saying, “I don’t see the point in being friends anymore” or “let’s take a break from this friendship” might be very hard to verbalize, especially if you have known someone for a very long time. However, it is much better to let a friendship go than to treat someone you have a long history with in hurtful or inappropriate ways.
7. **If a friendship needs to end, it does not have to end badly and you do not have to harbor hostile feelings.** You can leave a friendship, know that you will always love that person, and at a point in time, he or she was the constant that made things better when you were down and out.
8. **Sometimes things are cyclical; there is a reason and a season for everything.** Just because a specific friendship withered away does not mean it will not bloom again. You both might simply need a break. Like all things in life, if it is meant to be, it will be and if it was not meant to be, it was good the relationship ended.
9. **Changes in your relationships are not always about you.** Your presence might remind someone of a bad time-period in their life, one they would rather forget. In order to leave those memories in the past and to move on, it might be easier, or better, for that person to stop associating with you. If your friend has decided to say goodbye to a certain time and that includes you too, be glad they are stronger, happier, and more confident, then move on with your own life.
10. **Do not get stuck in your own stuff!** Sometimes we are so caught up in our own feelings it is hard for us to think through someone else’s feelings. Being able to process how your words and actions make other people feel will not only make you a better friend, but a better person.

The importance of positivity in your relationships is the primary goal. Surround yourself with people who have your best interest at heart. Equally essential, surround yourself with people who know you have their best interest at heart. You do not want the negative energy that comes from those who think you are out to do them wrong. If in your friendships negative feelings outweigh the good, attempt to fix the dynamic or let the friendship go. It is the perfect time to decide what you want from yourself and those around you. It is up to you to make your life happy, peaceful, and prosperous.