

## The Value of Friendship

In celebrating, National Friendship Day on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, we take a moment to reflect on the friendships in our lives. When we hear the word ‘friendship’, instantly an image comes to mind. Maybe the image is a group of your close friends or one particular friend who you have known for many years. Friendship is an essential part of our daily lives, holding great emotional value, by allowing us to find comfort both in difficult and happy times.

Relationships are founded on our ability to connect with other people, and this connectedness begins from the moment we are born. The relationships we create and nurture throughout life are one of the most important elements to living. These relationships bring special meaning to life’s experiences by providing us with a sense of belonging and purpose. As we develop relationships, the quality and degree of closeness can vary and in special circumstances, the relationship can mold into a friendship. Friendship is a unique degree of closeness and words can even be used to describe this such as: ‘dear’, ‘best’, or even ‘close’. Friendships can last a lifespan, many years, or be time limited; no matter the length, many of them leave an emotional impression that is unforgettable.

So, what is the importance of friendship when it comes to our mental health and recovery? Research shows that relationships play a key role in lessening symptoms of depression and anxiety. Close friendships can even make us more adaptive to stress. In 2017, Rachel K. Narr, Ph.D. published a new study that evaluated the long-term impact of good friendships in adolescence on mental health as an adult. The research concluded that the adolescents who were able to maintain friendships throughout their teenage years were less likely to experience depression and anxiety in later years. Furthermore, studies have even found that older adults who live an active social life are more likely to live longer when compared to peers who are less social (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020). Positive relationships will help guide us through some of our most difficult times and provide a sense of belonging and purpose, boost happiness, encourage us to change unhealthy behaviors, reduce stress, and improve self-confidence and self-worth.

In recovery, companionship with others who are sober can aid in maintaining sobriety. Positive friendships when recovering from an addiction can be one of the most important factors to a strong relapse prevention plan. Friends can provide support and counsel to a newcomer in recovery, helping them to learn new coping methods with handling life’s stressors. One of the great things about 12-Step Programs is that it provides individuals with the opportunity to build relationships through sponsorship and develop sober friendships within the program. This is one of the reasons peer support in recovery has such a positive impact, and its importance should not be understated.

Friendship is one of those things in life that we must continually work at to build and preserve. Maintaining a healthy relationship from within can be a key factor in building a healthy friendship with another person. Recommendations for building a relationship with yourself

include: being kind to yourself, daily self-care, adopting an attitude of curiosity and acceptance, short-term and long-term goals, set intentions, cultivate awareness and an optimistic behavior, surround yourself with goal-oriented people, have a personal crisis plan for life's difficult moments, and speak positively and calmly to yourself (Brenner, 2017). Wow! The recommendations for a healthy relationship with yourself, provides excellent examples for all of us to find ways we can better ourselves and in return become a better friend.

During this challenging time, let's remember that the support from friendship is one that softens some of our most challenging life events and enriches some of our most rewarding experiences. We have friendships in our lives that can help lessen our worries, stress, and sadness. Social media makes connecting to these friends very easy. Let's take time and reach out to a friend; we have not spoken to in a while. It might be the very thing they need right now too.

### References

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