

How To Build Strong Friendships

“With friends like that, who needs enemies!”

How many times have you heard a phrase like that describing a relationship in which colliding egos and clashing wills are destroying a relationship.

Genesis 2:18 [NIV] *“The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

It is natural for humans to seek out relationships because God created us with that need.

Loneliness and isolation gnaw at those who are without friends.

Good friendships are integral parts of the lives of every human being.

Proverbs 27:19 [Living Bible] *“A mirror reflects a man’s face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses.”*

Friendships have been called a mirror that reflects your moods, characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.

The only foundation of a strong relationship is a love, that is more concerned with others than with yourself.

Where can we receive such a love for other human beings?

In the New Testament of the Christian Bible there is one Greek word that describes such a love that is the foundation of a strong and perfect friendship.

1 John 4:7-8 [NIV] *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

The Greek word used throughout this passage of scripture is “*agapé*” meaning a spontaneous love, irrespective of the rights or response of the person receiving this love. A sacrificial love where the selfish desires are sacrificed in order to show this love to others.

Notice the scripture states the origin of this love, our Creator God.

John 15:12-14 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

Again this sacrificial love is linked to lasting friendships with God and other human beings.

With this foundational building block of all lasting friendships let us examine what can build a strong friendship and what can break it down.

What hurts relationships

Jealousy:-

Jealousy can destroy a friendship because it erodes your outgoing concern for the other person in that friendship more than anyone else.

Jealousy is suffocating to a friendship because it goes hand in hand with lust.

Instead of caring and sharing, lust gets and takes advantage of others, finally killing the friendship.

Distrust:-

Distrust thwarts the closeness, openness and sharing that are so essential to friendship.

What leads to distrust is gossip and tale-bearing, by people who seem to constantly run others down, even those they call their friends.

It is very hard to dispel what others have said about you.

Proverbs 18:21 [Living Bible] *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they who indulge in it shall eat the fruit of it, for death or life.”*

This misuse of the tongue can bring death to any friendship.

Flattery:-

Flattery is defined as *“excessive praise given with for ulterior motives.”* Shows insincerity in a friendship.

A compliment on the other hand is *“an expression of appreciation offered with sincerity, with no thought of personal gain.”*

Proverbs 15:23 [NIV] *“A man finds joy in giving an apt reply, and how good is a timely word!”*

A word of encouragement can lift a friend who is down.

Proverbs 25:11 [NIV] *“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”*

You can make a friend feel good all day by giving them a word of praise when they are struggling with a problem.

Friendship building blocks

Appreciative listening:-

This is a very successful building block for friendship.

This type of listening isn't just a polite pause in the conversation.

Appreciative listening is responding to others' comments in a way that lets them know that you think their ideas, feelings and experiences are important.

This can be done without words by body language.

A direct focus of your eyes, that is **not** distracted by events happening around you.

A positive nod of the head, and an expression of appreciation on your face.

No frowns, hard looks, or the tossing of the head in disbelief.

Tact is important in active listening if we are asked to comment.

It only takes a split second to rehearse what you are about to say to ensure it is not detrimental to those who hear it.

Rules of friendly conversation

How can you use conversation to build up a strong relationship?

1 Don't grab the conversation

You do this with comments such as “*yes, but now take me for instance...*”

2 Don't let your gaze wander

Keep constant eye contact with the person speaking, giving undivided attention to the speaker.

3 Affirm the other person's feelings

This is done by giving praise, encouragement, hope or just a nod of the head in approval.

4 Don't interrupt

Allow the other person to complete what they are trying to say. If they pause, seeking the correct words to use, do not finish the sentence for them.

5 Try to experience the other person's feelings

You do this in your mind's eye by placing yourself in their shoes, as if what they are explaining is how you would react in their place.

6 Don't try to top the other person's story or joke

You may have had an even more dramatic experience but “*bite your tongue*” and let them enjoy the full impact of what they are saying.

7 Don't argue

1 Corinthians 13:7 [The Living Bible] “*If you love someone [your friend] you will be loyal to them no matter the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, and always stand your ground in defending them.*”

This is giving the positive nurturing that every friendship needs.

Both people in a friendship need to be gaining from the friendship.

Disagreement in friendships is fine, if friends never have conflicting views it could be a sign of apathy.

But such differences don't have to lead to quarrelling.

People with convictions disagree.

If however, two people share a deep bond of affection, it will survive **constructive** argument.

8 A budding friendship takes time and commitment

This commitment has to come from both parties for their friendship to become lasting and fulfilling.

The key to this is to be more concerned for the other's welfare than your own.

That is what makes friends.

Fame and fortune in our lives are relatively minor evidence of a successful person.

You will be truly successful if you become a loving, giving individual, one who is constantly building friendships and trying to bring happiness to others.