

Choosing Friends Wisely

Objective

To identify ways to build and maintain healthy friendships.

What to Know

Building and maintaining fulfilling and rewarding friendships is an important part of a healthy, active social life and good mental health! Because friends influence how you think, feel, and behave, it is important to seek friends that have positive qualities. In addition, research has found that the people you associate with have a major impact and influence on your success. Here are some suggestions to help you choose friends wisely.

Choose a friend that:

- **is honest.** Trust and honesty are the cornerstones of any relationship. Surround yourself with people act in integrity.
- **accepts your quirks and sense of humor.** Choose friends who laugh *with* you rather than *at* you.
- **stands by you during hard times.** Choose friends that are strong enough to be there when you need them the most.
- **gives as much as they take.** When a relationship is one-sided, you may end up feeling resentful and angry. Every friendship involves compromise and give-and-take.
- **likes and values the things you do.** It is helpful if you choose friends who share your interests. They do not have to like *everything* you do, but it is important to have some shared interests.
- **has similar values.** While you can respect others' opinions and differences, choosing friends that hold similar values to yours can keep you from being negatively influenced by people that do not uphold your values and standards.
- **shares common goals.** When you have friends with common goals, you can hold each other accountable, work on your goals together, and encourage each other in reaching them.
- **seeks knowledge.** Life is about learning, growing, and advancing, and you can learn from friends who enjoy expanding themselves in positive ways. For example, friends who are avid readers are often great conversationalists.
- **accepts you.** It is important that you can share your thoughts, opinions, and feelings without limits, and be yourself.
- **offers emotional support.** Good friends consistently and genuinely support you and offer guidance and advice when you request it. They support your decisions, even if they do not agree with you.
- **celebrates your success.** A true friend will celebrate your milestones, accomplishments, and successes. They will be genuinely happy to see you succeed.

- **brings balance in areas where you might be weak.** Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Tap into the talents, skills, and abilities of friends that have expertise in areas you do not.
- **brings out the best in you.** Healthy friends encourage you to develop into the best version of yourself.
- **motivates and encourages you.** Choose friends that are uplifting, positive, and willing to be there to listen and help you put a positive spin on any situation. They hold you accountable and encourage you.
- **is respectful.** Good friendships are built on mutual respect. Cultivate respect for your friends and their choices – even if you do not always share the same interests or preferences.

You might wonder where you can meet potential friends. Here are a few tips.

1. Focus on making in-person friends. Finding friends online can be a positive experience – especially if you are shy or struggle with meeting new people. But building friendships in-person often leads to deeper and more meaningful connections. If you are shy, follow interesting people and comment on their posts or chat with them. Eventually, you may feel comfortable meeting in real life.

2. Take a class or join a club. You can expand your friendship circle by trying new situations. Connect with others who share similar interests and build meaningful friendships with them.

3. Volunteer. You can meet new people and build friendships by volunteering for a cause or an organization you believe in. Volunteering is a great way to meet people who share your values, beliefs, and goals.

4. Associate higher. If you are concerned about taking your life or career to the next level, begin to associate with people on that level. Even though it is natural to feel most comfortable with people who are like you, sometimes it is helpful to step outside your comfort zone and spend time with potential friends who can expose you to greater things, new information, and a higher level of living.

This worksheet will help you use the above suggestions and tips to build and maintain healthy friendships while choosing friends wisely.

What to Do

Building and maintaining healthy friendships takes time, so this activity will allow you to begin the process of making new friends. For the next month, use the tips and suggestions above to do at least one thing every day. For example, you might ask a co-worker out to lunch, volunteer for a local non-profit organization, or reach out to a social media friend to set up an in-person meeting. Just take one small step every day, and before you know it, you will have strong and healthy friendships!

Date	Action	With whom?	Outcome

Did this activity help you identify how to choose friends wisely? Why or why not?

What else can you do to build and maintain friendships?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was most challenging about this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
