



Senior Series

*The Ohio
Department of
Aging*



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Friendships in Adulthood

Relationships with friends are important to older adults. Friends contribute to our satisfaction with life, give us a sense of belonging, competence, and self-worth. Friendship involves:

- Enjoyment and spontaneity—Spending time doing things together and sharing life experiences.
- Trust—Believing that our friends act on our behalf.
- Respect and understanding—Believing that our friends have the right to their own opinions.
- Mutual assistance—Helping and supporting our friends and letting them help us.
- Confiding—Sharing confidential matters with our friends.

Types of Friendships

Friends are people we know and trust. Friends are special to us socially and emotionally because they are our favorite companions and confidants. Friends are usually chosen from among people who are considered "social equals." This means that the

people we select as friends tend to be those who:

- we have grown up with, usually in the same neighborhood.
- have similar occupations.
- have children the same age.
- have similar interests.
- are the same general age and the same gender.

The majority of adults have three or more close friends and more than half of adults have ten or more friends.

Men and women have the same number of friends. Women, however, are likely to confide more in their friends than men. Men tend to enjoy activities or discuss and practice special skills (such as golf or hunting) with their friends.

Duration of Friendships

We expect different characteristics from long-term as compared to short-term friends. Long-term friends are the only people with whom we can reminisce about memories that occurred during our lifetime. Changes

in life such as health changes, widowhood, or retirement are less disruptive on long-term friendships. Short-term friendships help us to deal with changes that affect our daily roles, such as moving into a new area, volunteering, or starting a new job.

Changes in Friendships

Adults expect to receive emotional support and companionship from their friends. When such positive outcomes are not achieved, the results may be breaches of confidence, invasions of privacy, criticism, or loss of respect and reciprocity. In times of crisis, we expect close friends to provide support and companionship.

Friends Keep Us Healthy

Social interactions with friends help us lead longer and healthier lives. Studies have shown that people who enjoy the fellowship of friends live longer and are healthier than their counterparts who are socially isolated. Friends are relied upon for emotional support. A close network of friends helps us through the challenging times of life.

How Can Friends Help in Times of Crisis?

The best gift a friend can give is to be a good listener! Some other ways friends can strengthen their relationship are:

- keeping in regular contact by phone, mail, or in person.
- allowing your friend to express emotions. Many emotions may be unpleasant, but be empathetic.
- paying attention to your friend's feelings and his or her perception of the seriousness of the situation.
- being non-judgmental and not offering advice unless asked.
- preparing a meal and delivering it to your friend's home.
- doing your friend's laundry.
- running an errand for your friend.
- offering to relieve caregivers of their responsibilities.

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