

## Supporting Healthy Friendships Across the Ages

### **Making and Maintaining Friendships Guide for Individuals | Ages 4–30+**

*Friendships are a critical pillar of well-being at every stage of life. The way we build and sustain them changes as we grow — but connection, trust, and mutual support remain at the heart of it all.*

### **1 Friendship Strategies by Age**

| Age Range                  | Key Actions   | Questions to Reflect On / Ask Friends  | Friendship Maintenance Tips  |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| 4–7 Early Years            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invite friends to play in short, fun activities</li> <li>- Practice sharing, taking turns, and being kind</li> <li>- Read or watch stories about friendship</li> <li>- Talk about feelings openly</li> </ul>                       | <p>“Who did I play with today?”</p> <p>“How might my friend be feeling right now?”</p>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep a list of friends you like to play with</li> <li>- Pick one day each week to get together</li> <li>- Give a small drawing or note to a friend</li> </ul> |
| 8–11 Middle Childhood      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Join a club, sport, or group project</li> <li>- Practice listening and compromise</li> <li>- Invite friends to do activities outside school</li> <li>- Try joining games or starting conversations</li> </ul>                      | <p>“What was something fun I talked about with a friend today?”</p> <p>“Who would I like to see soon?”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check in with friends weekly</li> <li>- Remember birthdays or special days</li> <li>- Plan fun one-on-one time</li> </ul>                                     |
| 12–14 Tweens & Early Teens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make plans with friends and keep safety in mind</li> <li>- Think about what makes a friendship healthy</li> <li>- Balance online and in-person time</li> <li>- Learn how to handle peer pressure calmly</li> </ul>                 | <p>“What do I value most in a friend?”</p> <p>“How can I handle disagreements well?”</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set reminders to reach out</li> <li>- Send quick “thinking of you” messages</li> <li>- Plan hangouts ahead of time</li> </ul>                                 |
| 14–18 Teens                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take the lead in making social plans</li> <li>- Notice which friendships feel supportive vs. draining</li> <li>- Learn to navigate group dynamics and online social spaces</li> <li>- Stand up for yourself when needed</li> </ul> | <p>“Who really ‘gets’ me when life feels hard?”</p> <p>“What helps me handle friendship stress?”</p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schedule study sessions or hangouts</li> <li>- Stay connected via group chats</li> <li>- Celebrate each other’s wins</li> </ul>                               |

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|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| 19–23 Young Adults    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adjust to friendship changes from moving or finishing school</li> <li>- Mix old and new social circles</li> <li>- Keep boundaries and balance relationships with other responsibilities</li> </ul>         | <p>“Who lifts me up when I’m feeling low?”</p> <p>“How do I keep in touch with long-time friends?”</p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan occasional meetups (even virtually)</li> <li>- Send “thinking of you” notes</li> <li>- Celebrate milestones together</li> </ul>  |
| 24–29 Early Adulthood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be intentional about long-distance friendships</li> <li>- Connect through major life changes (career, housing, relationships)</li> <li>- Seek friendships in work, community, and hobbies</li> </ul>       | <p>“How do I make space for friendship in my busy life?”</p> <p>“What new connections have surprised me?”</p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set recurring catch-ups (coffee, calls, walks)</li> <li>- Share hobbies or activities</li> <li>- Ask for and offer support</li> </ul> |
| 30+ Adulthood         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accept that friendship dynamics shift with life stages</li> <li>- Deepen long-term friendships</li> <li>- Focus on quality relationships over quantity</li> <li>- Recognize that effort matters</li> </ul> | <p>“Which friendships have stood the test of time, and why?”</p> <p>“What helps us stay close when life is busy?”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create traditions or rituals</li> <li>- Offer help during life changes</li> <li>- Schedule friend time as a priority</li> </ul>       |

## 2 Conversation & Connection Starters

Use these to deepen bonds or reconnect:

- “Who has been making a difference in your life lately?”
- “What’s something you appreciate about our friendship?”
- “How do you handle disagreements or distance in friendships?”
- “Is there a friendship you’d like to reconnect with?”
- “What helps you feel close even from far away?”

## 3 Friendship Habits & Routines

- Visual reminders — keep photos, mementos, or lists of friend names and birthdays.
- Regular check-ins — build in weekly or monthly calls, texts, or meetups.
- Celebrate milestones — acknowledge moves, promotions, or rough patches overcome.
- Stay open to new friends — every stage of life offers opportunities through work, hobbies, or community events.

## 4 Keys to Strong Friendships at Any Age

🗣️ **Ask, listen, and respond with care.**





- Make time — connection doesn't happen by accident.**
- Be the kind of friend you want to have — reliable, respectful, and supportive.**
- Accept that friendships change — some deepen, some drift, and that's natural.**
- Value effort over perfection — reaching out is what counts.**

## 5 Troubleshooting Friendship Challenges

Even with effort and care, friendships don't always flow smoothly. Here are tips for navigating common struggles:

### When Forming New Friendships

- **Feeling left out?** Try joining activities where people share your interests (clubs, classes, volunteer groups). Sometimes it takes multiple tries to find your circle.
- **Struggling to start conversations?** Prepare 2–3 simple “go-to” questions (“What have you been into lately?” / “How was your week?”). Most people appreciate the effort.
- **Friendship isn't clicking?** Not every connection will feel right. Give it time, but allow yourself to step back if it feels one-sided or draining.

### When Maintaining Friendships

- **Not hearing back?** Gently check in (“Hey, just wanted to see how you're doing”). Avoid assuming the worst — life can get busy.
- **Conflict arises?** Use “I” statements (“I felt hurt when...” instead of “You always...”). Stay calm, listen, and try to understand their side.
- **Growing apart?** Acknowledge that some friendships naturally shift. Cherish what you shared while staying open to new connections.

### When You Feel Lonely or Discouraged

- Remember: friendship is a skill — it takes practice, not perfection.
- Try small steps: send one message, say hi to one new person, or attend one event. Each effort matters.
- If loneliness feels heavy, talk to a trusted adult, mentor, or counselor. Seeking support is a sign of strength.

## 6 Affirmations for Friendship Confidence

Use these phrases when you feel uncertain, left out, or discouraged about friendships.

### General Confidence





- *“I am worthy of love, kindness, and connection.”*
- *“Every friendship I build helps me grow.”*
- *“It’s okay to take small steps toward connection.”*

## **When Friendships Feel Difficult**

- *“Not every friendship will last forever, and that’s natural.”*
- *“I can communicate my needs calmly and respectfully.”*
- *“Even if this friendship changes, I will be okay.”*

## **When Feeling Lonely**

- *“I am not alone — others also seek connection.”*
- *“I can find new ways to reach out and be seen.”*
- *“Friendship is built over time, and I trust the process.”*

## **For Reassurance**

- *“The effort I make to be a good friend matters.”*
- *“I bring unique value to my friendships.”*
- *“Healthy friendships are about quality, not quantity.”*

