Your Guide to Making and Being A GOOD FRIEND

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YOUR GUIDE TO MAKING AND BEING A GOOD FRIEND

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INTRODUCTION

If you ask your dad or mom or grandparent or favorite aunt how they made friends when they were growing up, what do you think they would tell you?

They would probably talk a lot about meeting kids at school, in extracurricular activities, or in their neighborhood. They might even tell you stories about how they met their best friend while hanging out at the mall or the skating rink or the local multiplex.

Things you probably won't hear, however, include words like chat rooms, online gaming, apps, and social media platforms. Most of those things didn't exist in their childhood. Or, if they did, they were not widely available or easily accessible.

Because you've grown up in a digitally wired, interconnected world, the way you can meet and make friends surely looks and feels a lot different than what

most adults experienced back in their youth. You might be thinking how much easier it is for you to find potential friends. When all you have to do is "like," "follow," "tag," or "DM" someone, how hard can it be? Everyone everywhere could be a cyberfriend in waiting, right?

Wrong.

It is true that the devices you hold in your hand every day (phone, gaming console, or tablet) give you many more ways to find and connect with others. These gadgets can open up opportunities to reach out to people who are from geographic, cultural, racial, and social groups that may be much different from your own. All of that can be wonderful and enriching.

What's not so great, though, are the things you give up or never experience if most of your free time is spent alone staring at a digital device. Did you know, for example, kids your age who spend significant time online are more likely to feel anxiety and depression? They also are more likely to have sleep problems and self-esteem issues.

You put yourself at risk physically and emotionally by being constantly connected and scrolling social media. But you also risk the relationships you have in real life too.

Excessive screen time takes you away from experiencing face-to-face interactions. You miss out on opportunities to bond with and make personal connections. Learning how to understand the emotions of others, build trust with them, and resolve conflicts become more difficult. You lose opportunities to develop your interpersonal skills – skills you need to make friends

and be a friend – like patience, empathy, teamwork, and forgiveness. And when you pay more attention to the screen in front of you than the people around you, it makes it that much harder for them to get to know you, want to spend time with you, or build a friendship with you.

So, before reading any further, make a promise to yourself that you will set some limits, that you will spend less time on your digital devices and more time engaging with people in person. Do more of the things your parents and grandparents did, and then use the straightforward strategies and tips described in this book to strengthen the relationships you have with classmates, adults, your family, and just about anyone whom you meet in real life.

You have the potential to make friends – lots of them! And you are capable of making your current friendships better than they have ever been before. Let others see the wonderful qualities you have and use those qualities to live a happier, fuller life!

MY SCREEN-FREE CHALLENGE

Starting today and for the next seven days, I will...

Not look at my phone until after breakfast.

Focus on my friends during school lunch by keeping my phone in my pocket for the first 15 minutes.

Find new ways to spend time with a friend offline.

Not take my phone with me to bed.

Spend an hour outside each day without my phone or with my phone off.

Hang out with a friend face to face.

Introduce myself to someone new every day.

At the end of the seven days...

How have my relationships with my family changed?

How have my relationships with my friends changed?

Have I gotten more sleep?

How has my mood changed?

How did it feel when I didn't have my phone?

How can I balance online friendships with my real-life ones?

What other things can I do to limit how much time I spend on my digital devices each day?

CHAPTER 1

10 STEPS TO MAXIMIZE MY FRIEND POTENTIAL

Everyone needs friends. Friendships can make us happier, healthier, and more hopeful.

However, the ability to make friends varies from person to person. To some people, making friends is easy. To others, it's a challenge. This chapter takes a look at what makes good friendships and explores how you can learn to make new ones or make your current ones better.

Friendship is one of the most precious gifts you can give and receive. Good friends can help you become a better person. They can help you know and understand yourself. But how does friendship start?

Most people don't think a lot about it, but friendships don't just happen. There is a fascinating process that takes

place between people. Let's start at the basics and look at relationships more closely.

Even though there are no rules or referees, no exact definitions or set formulas to human relationships, there are differences in the way we treat and feel about other people. We put people we know in three general categories: acquaintances, companions, and friends.

Acquaintances are people you see occasionally. You might say "hi" or exchange small talk. An acquaintance could be someone who rides the same bus as you, has a class with you, or works in the same place you do. Acquaintances also could include the friendly dental hygienist you see once or twice a year, the local librarian who helps you find good books to read, or the clerk at your neighborhood convenience store. Time spent around one another consists of brief encounters. You probably are pleasant to one another and get along okay, but there's not much more to it than that. Nothing has ever happened to make the relationship develop or change for better or worse; it's just there.

Companions, on the other hand, are closer to you because you share common experiences. You spend more time around companions than you do around acquaintances. You could be on the same sports team, share a locker at school, or be in a youth group together. You might work together, take the same classes in school, or live in the same neighborhood. The things you do together are tied to a common interest; it's kind of like the glue that holds your relationship together. You

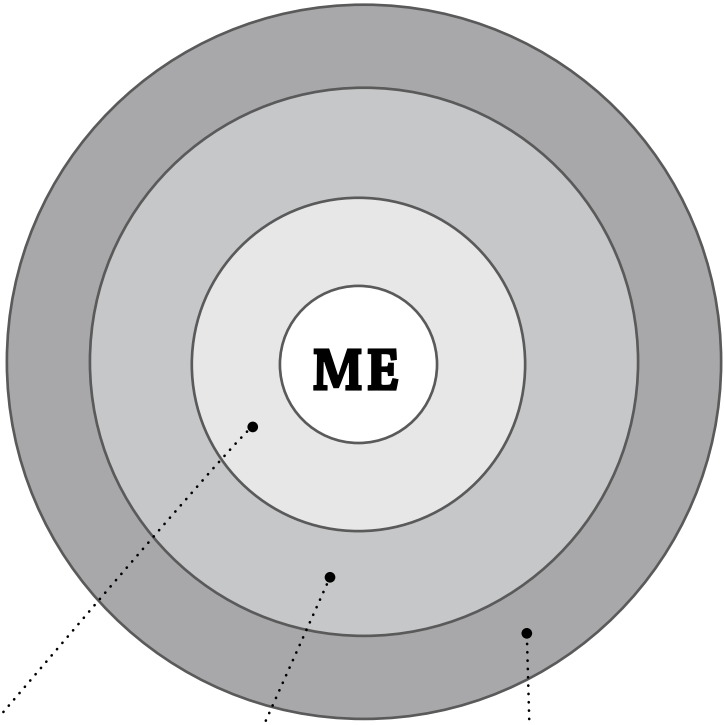
might have fun doing things together. It's also possible that you might not like each other that much, but you frequently find yourself doing the same things.

Friends are the "real deal." These are people you choose to spend a lot of time with. That's very different from acquaintances and companions. Friends are special people because you do things for them as well as with them. Friends are there for the good times, bad times, and all the times in between. And having a "best" friend is awesome.

Sometimes a companion, or even an acquaintance, can become a friend. That's what makes friendship so exciting – just about anyone can become a friend. Take a moment to think about the people in your life. Where do they fit in your circle of friendship?

Circles of Friendship

Identify your friendship circles by writing names in the circles according to the impact they have on your life.



INNER CIRCLE

Those who are the closest to you, and who you can trust to always be there for you. Reserved for very few people; family & friends.

MIDDLE CIRCLE

People who you enjoy talking to and spending time with. You share interests, experiences, joys, and frustrations.

OUTER CIRCLE

Relationships that are a part of your life, but don't involve a deep connection. You share laughs, but not innermost feelings.

Adapted from yourlifeyourvoice.org.

Ten Rules for Friendship

Every person has the capacity to make friends – lots of them! But most people never come close to reaching their "friendship potential." Making friends is a skill, and the first step in developing that skill is knowing how to get along with others. Friends don't become friends overnight. Friendships take time.

People who are good at getting along with others take an interest in what other people like. They learn to develop interests that make them enjoyable to be around. Therefore, the more things you know how to do that involve interacting with other people, the more likely you are to make friends.

If someone were to list the Ten Rules for Friendship, the following should be included:

1. Do things together (face-to-face, not just online).
2. Be honest.
3. Talk about ideas, hopes and dreams, fears and disappointments.
4. Encourage one another to do what's right.
5. Be trustworthy and trusting.
6. Talk out problems and disagreements.
7. Look out for one another.
8. Listen carefully to one another.
9. Support each other in down times.
10. Have fun.

That's it. If you can follow these rules, you don't need to read any further. Being a good friend will be simple. But wait…

Think for a minute. These rules aren't easy to live up to, are they? The truth is they often are downright difficult. How many people do you know who treat others like that? Probably not many, or we wouldn't have so much hurt in the world. People have a habit of making others feel bad. So, before you put down this book, read a little more about what being a good friend is all about.

Let's first start by looking at what is listed last, Rule Number 10. Having fun is a crucial element in friendship. If you can have fun with someone, you create opportunities for a deeper, more meaningful relationship to develop. Fun often kickstarts friendships.

Having Fun Is No Joke

Having fun is healthy. It keeps you emotionally fit, just as exercise keeps you physically fit. We should all celebrate the fact that we have the capacity to smile and laugh and feel good. And in the process, we can make others smile and laugh and feel good too. That's powerful!

Unfortunately, too many kids never reach their potential for having good, healthy fun with others. Some use video games, their phones, social media platforms, or TV to find fun and then end up spending lots of their time alone. Screen time can be okay, in moderation, but it should never be a replacement for having face-to-face interactions and making real-world connections.

Other kids take needless risks, such as using alcohol or other drugs, because they believe that fun can be found artificially. That's sad. The healthiest fun is right in front of them – friendships with other people.

But it's not just kids. Some adults have a problem making friends too. There are some sour, angry grown-ups out there who never found out what it takes to get along with other people. Their lack of friendships and connections creates feelings of loneliness and bitterness. That's why the time for you to learn how to enjoy friends is now.

Try to put the following tips into practice. Then you will learn how to enjoy life and have fun with others.

Realize your own goodness. All change comes from within you. You have skills and talents that others can enjoy. You really do. You also have a basic need to like others and be liked in return. Now is the time to meet that need.

You are worthy and good inside. Some people just don't let others see their true goodness; for whatever reasons, they keep it hidden. And when they do that, they cannot share themselves with others.

Once you begin to trust your own goodness, doubts and bad feelings are doomed. You'll still make mistakes; that's normal. But that doesn't make you a bad person. Once you feel good about yourself, you will be enjoyable to be around. So, step number one: Realize and believe with all your heart that you are a good person who has something to share with others.

Develop a sense of humor. If you are always serious, lighten up. A scowl and a frown are "red lights" to friendship; they'll quickly stop people from approaching you. A smile and a laugh are "green lights" to friendship and show people how friendly you can be.

Learn to laugh at yourself and your imperfections. It will release some of the stress in your life.

If you ever feel like poking fun at someone, let it be you, not anyone else. Look on the bright side. Look for humorous situations. Learn to tell jokes. Collect funny stories, video clips, or comic strips. Learn how to make puns and have fun with language. Try to do some impersonations of famous people or create silly dance moves.

There are times, of course, when laughing and joking around are not appropriate. Never let your sense of humor be disrespectful, rude, or mean. Laughter is good medicine, but it should be used at the right times.

And if humor is still hard for you, try to surround yourself with others who make you laugh and feel better. We all need a good laugh from time to time. Studies show that we are happiest when we are around those who are also happy.

Finally, smile, smile, smile. It makes people wonder what you've been up to. It also is a friendly, open, and welcoming behavior.

Respect the rights of others. They have their opinions; you have yours. Different opinions are healthy.

Life would be pretty blah if everyone thought alike. Please don't think other people are dumb for disagreeing with you. Let them say what they think. And remember: You deserve the same respect from them.

Learn how to listen to others without putting them down or trying to convince them that your opinion is right. It's fun to look at things from another angle.

Be kind. This doesn't mean you are soft or weak; it takes a great deal of courage. Throughout your life, you will learn that if you are kind to others, they probably will be kind to you. Kindness is one of the links in the chain that holds people together.

Being kind is like planting flower seeds that one day will bloom and be enjoyed. Being unkind is like planting weed seeds that grow up and choke out all the beauty around you. Don't help the weeds grow. We have enough unkindness already. Instead, scatter as many seeds of kindness as you can. And make sure you take the time to enjoy the flowers that grow from them.

When should you start being kind? Right now. Help someone in need. Give someone a compliment. Open the door for someone. Wave to a friend. Encourage someone who is down. Say something positive. There are hundreds of little things you can do to show kindness.

You'll find that being kind is a profitable investment, one that pays big dividends. Not only will other people like you, but you'll also like yourself and feel good inside. That's the best of both worlds.

Be empathetic. In other words, try to understand what others are going through. Look at life through their eyes. Remember times when you felt the same way, and remember how much it hurt. If you empathize and understand someone's feelings, you can help. Friendships are fragile and require as much care in handling as other fragile and precious things.

Be constructive and hopeful. You don't always have to be happy with things, that's not realistic. But if you are unhappy with something, and it's something that can be changed, try being constructive in your feedback. People get tired of listening to constant whining. It accomplishes nothing except turning other people off. Life doesn't always go the way you want. Learn to accept what you can't change, and work hard to change what you can. Forget about the little things that bug you. Replace time spent complaining with time spent being kind.

Keep being friendly. Even when you encounter people who are often negative or close-minded, be true to yourself. It's important not to let the negativity of others change you. Instead, continue to show them your goodness and positivity. Continue to be kind and friendly, and things will usually be okay.

Following these tips will help you have fun. You see, having fun isn't just laughing, playing, and joking around, although they are important. Having fun also means having a sense of joy and pleasure.

Let's look at when and where you can put these ideas to use.

Meeting People and Making Friends

Getting along with others requires action. You can't sit back and hope friends will fall from the sky. You have to get out and meet people. If you're shy, there are some great tips to help you in Chapter 6.

The first step is simple. Go places you enjoy, and do things you like to do. In the process, you will meet others who enjoy similar interests. Having something in common means you will have more to talk about. Pick a time to "break the ice" with someone. Make it light and casual, such as, "Do you come here a lot?" or "You're good at that." Improve your conversation skills. (The next chapter has many tips to help you improve your ability to talk with others.)

It doesn't matter what your interests are. What is important is doing something that will help you meet other people. If you don't have a lot of interests that involve being with others, get busy. Find things that you're good at and learn how to use them to meet people. Get to know other kids by being involved in sports, music, clubs, faith groups, and other extracurricular activities. It makes sense that the more people you meet and talk with, the more likely you are to find people who have the qualities you look for in a friend.

Pages 18-94 are not included in this excerpt.

RELATIONSHIPS/TEENS
Ages 10-16

LEVEL UP YOUR FRIENDSHIPS IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY!

You can have real and rewarding friendships – lots of them. And you can be the kind of friend everyone needs. But you can't only wish and hope for it to happen.

YOU HAVE TO WORK AT IT.

These pages are filled with step-by-step strategies, straightforward suggestions, and handy tips that will help you improve your people skills and widen your social circle. The basic (but essential!) requirements you need to make and maintain healthy friendships are spelled out with simplicity and clarity:

- Treating others with respect
- Having a sense of humor
- Embracing positivity
- Using social media and technology wisely
- Knowing the hidden rules that make relationships work
- Being good at small talk and active listening
- Shedding insecurities and shyness

If you want to beat back loneliness, boost your confidence, and bring more fun and laughter into your life, let this be your guide to making new, more, and lasting friendships!

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