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5 Types of Friends You Need (and a Few You Don't)

By Lisa Ellis

Friends matter. They inspire, advise, and comfort us in a way no one else can. Here are examples of some friendships worth cultivating, and others worth cutting.

"Women have friendships outside of their romantic relationships and families in order to maintain independence," says relationship advice expert April Masini, who runs a free advice website at www.AskApril.com. "Their friends give them an escape, a perspective, and an outlet for everything that happens within their family relationships."

Not all friends are created equally, though. Having different types of friends—who bring a variety of *good friend traits* to their interactions—help many women meet an array of needs, says LeslieBeth Wish, EdD, MSS, psychologist/licensed clinical social worker, and author of the upcoming book, *Smart Relationships*.

Good Company

Here are five types of friends that can enhance your life. Be sure to put them on speed dial!

1. Long-Time Friend

If your life is like a soap opera, your long-time friend makes it possible to fast-forward to the exciting parts without having to repeat the basic (boring) details. This BFF (best friend forever) knows you well—probably since childhood (or at least college—so she'll be up on all of the characters in your stories, says Wish. You probably have many shared experiences to draw on, which can provide a comforting familiarity.

2. True-Blue Friend

When the chips are down, your true-blue friend is at your side. You can count on her to be honest and loyal and have your best interest at heart in all sorts of circumstances. "This is the friend who tells you the truth and has your back," Masini says. "This is the friend who respects you, and commands respect herself." Your true-blue friend is a good person to turn to for marital advice, or when you need someone to accompany you to the doctor for a medical procedure or to help you through a stressful time.

3. Fashionista Friend

This gal makes looking good look so easy. She always looks so put together and loves to share her stylish wisdom. Ask her anything—from where to buy it, what styles are in, and when to get the best sales. (Just don't ask to borrow her cute new top. She can point it out. But she's not sharing!) Take your fun fashionista along on your next shopping trip but be sure to bring plenty of cash or your credit cards. Clothes and accessories easily excite fashionistas—and that passion can be contagious!

4. Bleacher Buddy

If your children play sports, chances are you spend half of your life at various sporting events and have become chummy with some of the other parents. Masini tags such friendships *bleacher buddies*. As you watch the action on the field you catch up on the highlights of your lives in tidbits. Often bleacher buddy friendships play out on the sidelines in-season—with long lags in between—but that usually works enabling you to pick up where you left off next time you connect. Occasionally, you might even hit it off on a deeper level if you find your bleacher mate has other good friend traits.

5. Virtual Friend

Friendships that blossom via the Internet are growing in popularity, Masini says. "These friendships can happen on a Scrabble website, or on a cancer supporter's forum, where intimacy between people with shared interests is the link to these friendships." While many virtual friends rarely meet face-to-face (much like Pen-Pals of the past), they can still serve as a rewarding form of socialization and better yet, can be easy to connect with even when your schedule is busy. However, you need to keep your eyes open when cultivating a "virtual friendship," points out relationship expert Victoria Fleming, PhD, LCPC, NCC, author of *You Complete Me and Other Myths that Destroy Happily Ever After*. "A person can share intimacies online through stories and photos, and it feels genuine; but often she is really having a relationship with her own projected image of who this friend is, which may or may not bare resemblance to the real person."

Friendships to Avoid

There are also a few friend traits that are good to avoid. For instance, Masini suggests steering clear of "fair weather friends," or those who only seem interested in what you have to give them. You'll also want to avoid unreliable friends who always seem to cancel plans when something "better" comes along. In addition, Masini says to be wary about starting a friendship with your boss, your mother-in-law, and your ex-boyfriend, since all of them will have their own agendas and you'll probably never be on even ground.

How to Be a Good Friend

In order to have good friendships, Fleming says that you have to be a good friend with healthy boundaries. "The struggle many women have is knowing how to balance the give and take of a good friendship, which is, being available when your friend needs you, but without sacrificing your needs or the needs of your family in the process." And Fleming, Masini, and Wish all agree that while having good, healthy friendships always takes a lot of effort, what you receive in return makes it worth the effort.

April Masini, Victoria Fleming, PhD, LCPC, NCC, and LeslieBeth Wish, EdD, MSS, MA, reviewed this article.

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