

Is Something Missing?

Reclaiming stable friendships in a destabilized world



Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.

— WOODROW WILSON



Life is always full of ups and downs, but sometimes it can feel more rollercoaster-y than others. With one curveball after another the past few years, we've had to make frequent adjustments to keep calm (or not) and carry on.

Rolling with the during and post-pandemic punches has come at a cost to our social connections.

→ **1 in 3** Americans reported heightened loneliness during the pandemic.

→ Nearly **1 out of 5** US adults report having lost touch with *most of their friends*.

Why So Low, Friends?

Shrinking social circles were understandable during the pandemic, given the need to shelter at home and practice social distancing. But, surprisingly, the quality and quantity of our friendships began to decline as far back as 1990, long before COVID-19.

Experts theorize that broad structural changes may be playing an ongoing and significant role. We're working more and traveling and living more broadly. We're spending more time with our kids at the expense of outside relationships. We're also making most of our friends at work vs. in our communities over shared interests.

Individually, any of those changes can be a good thing, but together they give us a smaller pool for finding friends and less time to nurture relationships.

Friendship Matters.

Genuine friendships have a profound impact on our lives, providing obvious benefits like making us happier, supporting us through challenges, providing a sense of security and belonging, and nourishing our minds and souls.

The impact of having at least a few good friends goes beyond the obvious, though. Science has long supported surprising connections between strong social relationships and overall wellbeing.





PHYSICAL

Quality friendships can reduce risk factors that affect long-term health, like blood pressure, inflammation, and even our waist size.



EMOTIONAL

Friends boost endorphins and self-esteem, minimize the impact of stress, and help us bounce back from tough emotions like grief and anger.



MENTAL

Supportive and engaged conversations with friends improve brain function and may even offer protection from cognitive decline as we age.

Fear Not, Friends. There Is Hope.


The friendship news isn't all doom and gloom. Despite the decline in connection overall, most of us still report having a best friend, if not a few close friends.

The pandemic also helped us to realize the things that are truly important. Losing touch with friends was a powerful reminder of their true worth.

As the saying goes, "You never know what you've got 'til it's gone." Well, now we know, and that's driving a surge in the urge for reconnection.

How to (Re)Connect the Friendship Dots.

Like everything else in life, the more attention we give our friendships, the stronger they'll grow. Here are some ideas for (re)building friendship connections.

 **Take the first step** – If you've been thinking a lot about an old friend, chances are they've been thinking about you, too. Reach out with a simple,

"I've been thinking of you a lot and would love to chat" message. A text is fine if you're shy, but the phone is better. It can feel crazy good for you both to hear a long-lost voice.



Put in the time – Building stronger friendships requires consistent effort and investment. Make time for regular catch-ups, shared activities, and longer conversations. Definitely book the time in advance—better yet, make it a recurring appointment on your calendars with reminders.



Be a good listener – Show genuine interest in your friends' lives and actively listen to their thoughts and feelings. You'll have a lot of catching up to do at first, but remember, you have that recurring time on your calendars to do it!



Be transparent – Nothing builds trust and real friendship better than authenticity. Share your true self with your friends and encourage them to do the same. Embrace vulnerability by expressing your feelings, fears, and aspirations.



Be there – Show up for your friends when they need you. Be reliable and dependable by following through on commitments and offering a helping hand or shoulder to cry on during challenging times.



Commit to the thick and the thin – The strongest friendships will often be about two people learning how to be better versions of themselves, together. That means celebrating the good, unpacking the bad, and helping each other learn from mistakes. Be a cheerleader or go to the mat for each other. Bring the tough love, but never the judgment.

Finally, when it comes to building solid friendships, go for quality over quantity. The same studies examining the friendship/wellbeing connection reveal that supportive relationships bring the most benefits. Remember that a great friendship is a two-way street. Effort, understanding, commitment, authenticity, and happiness should come from both directions.

For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Platform by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

Call: 800.344.4222
employees.concernhealth.com