

# Nurturing Your Friendships and Relationships

Participant Packet

Solutions to Everyday Problems

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# Nurturing Your Friendships and Relationships

## OVERVIEW

Our relationships with our friends are just as important as our relationships with our family. In fact, it is our friendships that often rejuvenate our spirit after a bad day at work or a fight with our partner and/or children. Friendships should be safe havens, a place for support and unconditional love. Very importantly, friendships are important in helping us maintain balance in our lives.

However, like any relationship, friendships also require some effort, our time and energy. They also provide fertile ground for self-awareness. In this seminar, you will learn how to nurture your friendships, 'use' them as opportunities for self-knowledge, and expand your capacity for generosity and compassion.

### **Agenda Topics:**

- Welcome
- The Importance of Friendships
- How to Nurture Friendships
- "Growing Ourselves" - Commitment and Responsibility
- When Differences Arise
- Professional Relationships
- Wrap-up

Seminar Length:      Approximately 1 hour

## The Importance of Friendships

### Support

Friends provide us with the support needed when we are faced with those difficult times in our lives, the times we experience loss, confusion and fear. They ease our burdens. They are also there to share our successes and achievements, which adds to the joy of the experience. Have you ever noticed the sweet anticipation of telling a good friend about some wonderful experience you've had? You get to relive it all over again!

### Companionship

Friends are companions along life's path. They enjoy similar interests and hobbies and introduce us to new experiences. Friends cure loneliness. They take pleasure in our company and confirm for us that we are valuable and important. We play with friends!

### Understanding

A friend understands your deepest thoughts and feelings. It is safe to tell a true friend something about yourself that you may not be particularly proud of. Friends forgive your blunders and accept your limitations. An emotionally intimate friendship creates a feeling of safety and security.

### Continuity

A friend is an emotional bridge between you and the world of indifference. A long-standing friendship provides continuity between your past and your present. Your growth is mirrored in your friend's eyes, she is a witness to your journey. We 'belong' to the world through our relationships. Friendships help us live longer and healthier (studies have shown that an affiliative lifestyle plays a role in good health).

### Discussion Points:

Share with the group an experience you have had, receiving one of these gifts of friendship. This experience can be small acts of kindness or one that was so profound it changed the course of your life. Think about how you could ask for help from a friend if you needed to. Consider your ability to receive.

## How to Nurture Friendships

In order to receive the wonderful benefits of friendship, we must become the friend we seek to have in our lives. The following attributes contribute to healthy and successful relationships.

### Thoughtfulness

- Reach out
- Take the time
- Be proactive
- Anticipate and surprise
- Practice sensitivity and discretion
- Ask before giving feedback

### Respect

- Boundaries
- 'Fair fighting'
- Challenge with kindness
- Manage expectations
- Refrain from mind-reading

### Humility

- Tolerance
- Acceptance
- Forgiveness
- Flexibility

### Communication

- LISTEN, paraphrasing, reflecting
- Ask for what you need and want
- State what doesn't work
- Truth-telling, understand your intentions
- Be willing to negotiate
- Appreciate in words, actions
- Avoid 'absolute' statements

### Discussion Points:

Share with the group ways in which you provide the gifts of friendship to people in your life. Name ways in which you could become more "user-friendly"!

## “Growing Ourselves”

### ***Commitment***

What is the role friendship play in your life? How important are friendships to you? Some people organize or center their lives around friendships, others have friendships on the periphery of their lives, catching up with friends in their spare time. When something is important to us, we normally commit our time, energy, efforts to engage with it. Do you say friendships are important but rarely find the time to call, see, write your friends? Or, in the opposite direction, do the needs of particular friendships prevent you from taking care of other, equally important aspects of your life? Being out of balance creates stress in our lives, Make sure your commitments and actions are congruent.

How has change affected your friendships? Have you ever had the experience of having a close and satisfying friendship, only to see it unravel in the face of change? A friendship that is created under and based on a certain set of circumstances may not weather the changes and may eventually fade away. People and lives change. How do we know the friendship has reached its natural ‘life span’? How do we let go if it has? Successful friendships are not necessarily based on longevity. If the friendship continues, how do we navigate these changes successfully? One of the most important and effective tools we have in the face of change is to communicate well.

#### **Discussion Points:**

Consider your commitment to friendship. Is it important to you? How much value do you place on friendship, and what place does it occupy in your life? Have you lost friendships because of changes in circumstances, and how did you deal with this?

### ***Responsibility***

A healthy friendship requires rigorous self-honesty. We co-create all of our relationships, and we play a part in all the difficulties that arise between us and others. Conflict is a natural part of relating to another. It is a natural process in evolving and dynamic friendships, a signal that differences need to be addressed. If conflict goes underground, relationships usually suffer. So, the first question to ask yourself in the face of conflict is, “what part am I playing?”

#### **Discussion Points:**

How do you feel about conflict? In the face of it, do you: accommodate, blame, avoid, withdraw, criticize? What are other, healthier coping skills you might use when in conflict?

## When Differences Arise

When differences arise, communication is the key to getting back on track. Keep it simple and solution-focused.

### *If you have a grievance...*

- **Describe offensive behavior**
  - Focus on behavior, not on ascribing motivation or assigning character flaws. For instance: “you’re late and we may miss the opening” vs. “You’re always late; I’m not important; you’re insensitive”.
- **Explain impact on you**
  - Why is it important to you? How do you feel about it? What is the impact on your friendship?
- **Specify behavior change**
  - What would work better for the future?
- **Consequences**
  - If the offending behavior continues, what are the natural consequences (not punishment!)?

### *If your friend has a grievance.....*

- Find the grain of truth in your friend’s complaint
- Reach for understanding its effect on your friend
- Ask for support in making changes if you commit to doing it differently
- Stay focused on finding a win-win solution
- Clarify if you believe your friend has misunderstood (avoid defensiveness)

### *If your old, unfinished business is surfacing.....*

Conflict in a friendship may be due to our unfinished business (old hurts that haven’t been healed). Clues are: jealousy, envy, resentment, competition, codependency (giving beyond our means), unrealistic expectations, demanding perfection. You and your friend may be able to figure it out together, but if you reach an impasse, call CONCERN to help you sort it out. This is one of the greatest gifts friendship can provide, a gentle mirror to show us all those places in ourselves that need to heal.

## Professional Relationships

We spend much of our time in the workplace, a ready-made social environment. The workplace provides a wonderful opportunity to practice our friendships skills. Friendships can and do develop and flourish within this context. Here are a few questions to consider when asking yourself about workplace friendships.

- Are you a FRIENDLY co-worker?
- Do you strive to cooperate rather than compete?
- Do you support and encourage your peers?
- Do you welcome new members into the team?
- Do you try to get along with everyone, even those co-workers who are, at times, unfriendly?
- If your workplace friendships extend beyond the workplace, are you able to maintain your professional roles with each other when at work?
- Do friendships with co-workers interfere with your professional relationships with others at work?

### Discussion Points:

What are some of ways you can create friendlier relationships at work? How would more satisfying work relationships affect your workday? Think about one thing you can do today to improve your relationships at work.

# Seminar Evaluation Form

# CONCERN: Employee Assistance Program

Please fill out and return to presenter or HR Representative. Your feedback is very important to us. Thank you!

Seminar Title Nurturing Your Friendships and Relationships Date \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_ Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

Regarding the Seminar	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. How well were the seminar objectives met?					
2. Usefulness of seminar information?					
3. Length of seminar?					
4. Effectiveness of exercises?					
5. How would you rate this seminar overall?					

Regarding the Presenter	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. Presentation skills?					
2. Ability to answer questions?					
3. Knowledge of subject?					
4. Use of time?					
5. Overall assessment of presenter?					

### Additional Comments

1. What would you recommend to make this seminar more effective? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What part of the seminar did you find most helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Additional comments/suggestions for speaker's improvement? \_\_\_\_\_

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Thank you for your feedback.