

# The Power of Friendship

## Why We Need Close Friends

The science behind our deepest connections — and why they matter more than ever

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ People & Relationships

<b>Level</b>	B1 (Intermediate)
<b>Skill</b>	Reading
<b>Topic</b>	People & Relationships — Friendship, Loneliness, Well-being
<b>Duration</b>	30 minutes
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens & Adults

### Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a text about the psychology of friendship
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to emotions and relationships
- ◆ Identify health benefits of friendship and ingredients of genuine connection
- ◆ Discuss personal experiences with friendship
- ◆ Write about a meaningful friendship

## 1 Before You Read — Think About It

Think about your own friendships and discuss these questions:

1. How many close friends do you have? What makes them different from other people you know?
2. Where did you meet your best friend? How long have you known each other?
3. Do you think it is easier or harder to make friends as you get older? Why?

## 2 Reading: More Than Just Company

### More Than Just Company: The Science of Friendship

Human beings are social creatures. From the moment we are born, we seek connection with others — first with our parents and family, then with classmates and colleagues, and eventually with the people we choose to keep close throughout our lives. Friendship is one of the most important **relationships** we will ever have, yet in today's busy, hyper-connected world, genuine close friendships are becoming increasingly rare.

Recent studies paint a concerning picture. Across Europe and North America, the number of people who say they have no close friends has tripled since the 1990s. Researchers have begun to describe this trend as a **loneliness epidemic** — a widespread crisis of social isolation that affects people of all ages. But why does this matter? The answer is that friendship is not a luxury — it is a **necessity** for both our mental and physical health.

### The Health Benefits of Friendship

The evidence is remarkable. People with strong social connections are 50 percent more likely to live longer than those who are **isolated**. That makes loneliness roughly as dangerous as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Close friendships lower blood pressure, strengthen the **immune system**, and reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, and dementia. When you spend time with a good friend, your brain releases oxytocin — often called the "bonding hormone" — which reduces stress and creates feelings of trust and **well-being**.

Friendship also helps us cope with difficult times. When we face challenges such as losing a job, going through a breakup, or dealing with illness, having someone to talk to can make an enormous difference. Friends provide **emotional support**, practical advice, and sometimes simply a shoulder to cry on. Research shows that people who have at least one close friend recover from traumatic events faster.

## What Makes a True Friend?

We all have many **acquaintances** — people we know casually from work, school, or our neighbourhood — but true friendship is something deeper. Psychologists identify three key ingredients of genuine friendship: **trust**, **mutual** respect, and **vulnerability**. Trust means knowing that your friend will keep your secrets and be honest with you. Mutual respect means valuing each other as equals. And vulnerability — the willingness to show your true self — is what transforms a casual relationship into a deep, meaningful bond.

Research suggests that the number of close friends a person can maintain is limited. The British anthropologist Robin Dunbar proposed that humans can manage approximately 150 social connections, but only about five of these are truly close friendships — the people you would call in a crisis at three o'clock in the morning. Quality, it seems, is far more important than **quantity**.

## Friendship at Different Ages

Making friends comes naturally to children. Put two five-year-olds in a room with some toys, and within ten minutes they will be best friends. As teenagers, friendships become more intense and **complex**. Adolescence is a time when peer relationships shape our identity, our values, and our sense of belonging. The friendships we form during these years can be among the most **influential** of our entire lives.

As adults, however, making new friends becomes significantly harder. Long working hours, family responsibilities, and geographical moves all reduce the time available for socialising. Many adults report that their social circle shrinks dramatically after the age of thirty, and that the friendships they do maintain often feel more **superficial** than those of their youth.

## How to Build and Maintain Friendships

The good news is that it is never too late to strengthen your social connections. Experts recommend several strategies. First, prioritise face-to-face interaction over digital communication. Second, be consistent — regular contact, even if it is just a short weekly phone call, keeps friendships alive. Third, be willing to take the first step. Many people wait for others to reach out, but friendship is a two-way street.

Finally, remember that friendship is not about perfection. True friends disagree, disappoint each other, and sometimes go through difficult periods. What matters is the **commitment** to work through those challenges. The best friendships are not those that never face problems — they are those that survive them.

### 3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>relationship</b>	the way two or more people are connected to each other	A good relationship is built on honesty and respect.
<b>loneliness epidemic</b>	a widespread increase in people feeling socially isolated	Many countries are now experiencing a loneliness epidemic.
<b>necessity</b>	something absolutely needed, not optional	Friendship is not a luxury — it is a necessity for good health.
<b>isolated</b>	alone and separated from others; lacking social contact	Elderly people who live alone often feel isolated.
<b>immune system</b>	the body's defence mechanism against illness and infection	Close friendships can strengthen your immune system.
<b>well-being</b>	the state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy	Social connections play a major role in our overall well-being.
<b>emotional support</b>	providing comfort and encouragement to someone	She gave me great emotional support after I lost my job.
<b>acquaintance</b>	a person you know slightly but who is not a close friend	I have many acquaintances at work, but only two close friends.
<b>trust</b>	firm belief in someone's reliability and honesty	Trust takes years to build but only seconds to destroy.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>mutual</b>	shared by two or more people; felt equally by both sides	Friendship requires mutual respect and understanding.
<b>vulnerability</b>	the willingness to show your true emotions and weaknesses	Vulnerability is what turns a casual friendship into a deep bond.
<b>quantity</b>	the amount or number of something	The quantity of friends matters less than the quality.
<b>influential</b>	having a great effect on someone or something	Teenage friendships are among the most influential in our lives.
<b>superficial</b>	not deep or meaningful; existing only on the surface	Social media often creates superficial connections rather than real ones.
<b>commitment</b>	a strong dedication to a person, activity, or cause	A lasting friendship requires commitment from both sides.

## 4 Useful Collocations

close friend · social circle · emotional support · mutual respect · build trust · deep bond  
 · social connections · sense of belonging · face-to-face interaction · long-lasting  
 friendship · peer pressure · mental health · stay in touch · reach out · cope with ·  
 work through

## 5 Reading Comprehension

**1. What has happened to the number of people without close friends since the 1990s?**

- a) It has stayed the same
- b) It has doubled
- c) It has tripled ✓**
- d) It has decreased slightly

**2. How dangerous is loneliness compared to other health risks?**

- a) It is as dangerous as not exercising
- b) It is roughly as dangerous as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day ✓**
- c) It is less dangerous than eating unhealthy food
- d) It is only dangerous for elderly people

**3. What are the three key ingredients of genuine friendship?**

- a) Money, time, and shared hobbies
- b) Humour, intelligence, and kindness
- c) Trust, mutual respect, and vulnerability ✓**
- d) Loyalty, ambition, and confidence

**4. How many truly close friends can a person maintain, according to Dunbar?**

- a) About 2
- b) About 5 ✓**
- c) About 15
- d) About 150

**5. Why do adults find it harder to make friends?**

- a) Because they are less friendly than children
- b) Because they do not need friends as much
- c) Because work, family, and distance reduce the time available ✓**
- d) Because adults only use social media to communicate

**6. What is the most important quality of the best friendships?**

- a) They never have any problems
- b) They always agree on everything
- c) They live in the same city
- d) They survive problems through commitment ✓**

**6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

**isolated · trust · well-being · acquaintance · mutual · superficial · commitment · vulnerability**

1. After moving to a new city, she felt lonely and \_\_\_\_\_ from her friends.
2. It takes time to build \_\_\_\_\_ in a new friendship.
3. Social connections have a huge impact on our mental \_\_\_\_\_.
4. He is just an \_\_\_\_\_ — I only see him at work meetings.
5. A healthy friendship requires \_\_\_\_\_ respect from both people.
6. Social media often creates \_\_\_\_\_ connections rather than real ones.

7. Long-lasting friendships need \_\_\_\_\_ and regular effort.
8. Showing \_\_\_\_\_ — sharing your fears and weaknesses — makes friendships deeper.

## 7 Answer Key

### ■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. isolated
2. trust
3. well-being
4. acquaintance
5. mutual
6. superficial
7. commitment
8. vulnerability

## 8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

### ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- What qualities do you value most in a friend? Why?
- Do you think online friendships can be as meaningful as face-to-face ones?
- Have you ever lost a close friend? What happened, and how did you feel?
- What advice would you give to someone who finds it difficult to make friends?

### ■ Useful Phrases for Talking About Relationships

- **For me, the most important thing in a friendship is** honesty and trust.
- **I have known my best friend since** we were in primary school together.
- **What I appreciate most about my friend is that** she always listens without judging.
- **I think the reason why** adults struggle to make friends is that they are too busy.
- **In my experience,** the best friendships are those that survive difficult times.

 **Writing Task: A Friend Who Changed My Life**

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

**"Describe a friend who has had a significant impact on your life. How did you meet?  
What have they taught you? Why is this friendship important to you?"**

Use vocabulary from this lesson. Include specific examples and explain how this friendship has changed you as a person.