



Growing in Friendship

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FRED ROGERS, of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, described friends as those who have "smiled you into smiling, talked you in talking, sung you into singing, and loved you into loving." Friendships are among our most treasured gifts, coming into our lives in different ways and for different seasons.

A good friend can provide meaningful support when we are struggling. I recall meeting with a woman looking for help in battling depression. She had multiple challenges—health issues, financial worries, and strains in her marriage—and she felt overwhelmed. Although medications had helped improve her sleep and appetite, she remained immobilized and despairing. Then one day she arrived in a clearly changed frame of mind. She had received a call from a friend whom she had known years earlier. Her hope was renewed as this friend reminded her of past joyful years and of getting through difficult times together. Her friend helped her lift her eyes beyond her current hopelessness to see ways she could take steps to better her life, seeing beyond the impasses to the possibilities in her life.

Good friends also encourage us to grow into the best persons we can be. King Solomon, in the Bible, says that the "wounds of a friend are faithful." Dave Lotz, a teacher I respected during my teen years at a small school, became a friend through his encouragement and

coaching in soccer and debate club. Because I learned



to trust his commitment to my growth, I also was able to receive his concerns about my high sensitivity to criticism. When friends encourage, praise and even point out areas that need attention or correction, they are genuinely "faithful friends."

During our adult years, it may not be easy to find and nourish friendships. Friends and family members move because of work or other reasons. Our culture encourages "self-sufficiency," so we are not as likely to reach out to receive or give to neighbors. Given the reality of more transient social ties, we need to be intentional in seeking and developing friendships.

We all have an innate need for human connection. Fortunately, many places of worship organize small groups that provide a community for "fellow travelers." In addition, Internet "meet-up" groups provide a way to find friends who share our interests ranging from sports to bird watching. Groups for recovery, therapy, and support have also become places for individuals to experience life together. As C.S. Lewis said, "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: 'What! You, too? I thought I was the only one.'"

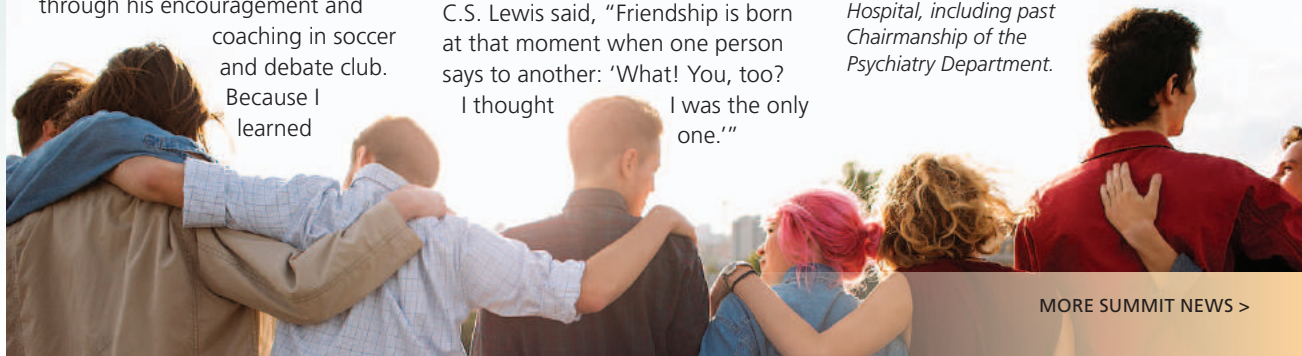
So if you are looking to develop more friendships, consider:

- 1 Many different friends have helped you become who you are today. Perhaps you could reconnect with some of them. Is there someone you could visit, call, or e-mail to express appreciation for their friendship?
- 2 There may be ways to engage, or engage more fully, with a friend group now. Is there a church or "meet-up" group you could visit, or a place you could volunteer, to connect with "kindred spirits"?
- 3 The value of any friendship is greatly affected by time spent together and by the degree of transparency you are willing to have (or test out). Who is someone with whom you feel safe enough to disclose a personal challenge or struggle? Who is someone with whom you could be more intentional (and listen to a bit more) in his or her life journey?
- 4 Don't shortchange yourself by minimizing platonic friendships in favor of searching for a one-and-only "best friend." Learn to treasure the different friendships that develop as you spend time with others, enjoying ("smiling them into smiling"), learning ("talking them into talking"), celebrating ("singing them into singing"), and caring more deeply ("loving them into loving"). ■

Daniel Wyma, MD, is board certified in adult psychiatry and neurology and in adolescent psychiatry. In addition to his office practice, Dr. Wyma has provided many years of service to Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital, including past Chairmanship of the Psychiatry Department.



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Summit Welcomes Dr. Traci D'Almeida



We are excited to introduce Traci D'Almeida, M.D., who joined us at Summit Clinical Services in February! Dr. D'Almeida's excellent communication skills, warm personality, and clinical expertise make a significant addition to our staff.

A Board Certified Adult Psychiatrist, Dr. D'Almeida completed medical school at the University of Szeged in Hungary and did much of her clinical work at Northwestern Medical School and the University of Toronto. She then joined the Adult Psychiatry Residency Program at Vanderbilt University before completing a fellowship in Consultation Liaison Psychiatry at University of Pennsylvania. She spent her initial years as a faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh, where she treated medically complex psychiatric patients, taught medical students and residents, and maintained an outpatient practice seeing transplant patients. She later joined Northwestern's faculty, where she practiced Inpatient and Consultation Psychiatry. Her areas of interest include treating psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, ADHD, and women's health problems, as well as depression and anxiety in the medically ill. Approaching the mind and the body as a whole, she believes that lifestyle and psychotherapy, in addition to medication when indicated, play a significant role in mental well-being.

To make an appointment with Dr. D'Almeida, call us at (630) 260-0606. ■

The Importance of Developing Friendships in Adolescence

POSITIVE FRIENDSHIPS ARE AN important part of the journey to adulthood. They help teach important social and emotional skills, like being sensitive to other people's thoughts, feelings and well-being. A teen's peers can be some of the most important social relationships, often contributing more to his/her development than families do. Strong peer relationships help teens achieve two of their most critical tasks: finding independence from their parents and developing their own personal identities.

New research published in the journal *Child Development* shows that 15- and 16-year-olds who had a close friend, rather than a bigger peer group of less intense relationships, reported higher levels of self-worth and lower levels of social anxiety and depression at age 25 compared with those who were more broadly popular as teens. Friendship predicts everything from

stronger psychological health and better stress responses to improved academic motivation and success during adolescence.

Rachel K. Narr, a PhD candidate in clinical psychology at the University of Virginia, led the study: "My hunch was that close friendships compared to broader friendship groups and popularity may not function the same way," she says. "Being successful in one is not the same as being successful in the other." Other studies show that there are two types of popularity: people who are likable—their peers trust them and want to be with them—and those who seek status, often wielding popularity as power.

Adolescent relationships are critically important because they are the first that teens form outside their families, and come at a time when identity is being formed. "It gives these kids the knowledge that they can build these extra-family relationships," says Narr.



"As technology makes it increasingly easy to build a social network of superficial friends, focusing time and attention on cultivating close connections with a few individuals should be a priority," writes Joseph Allen, a psychology professor at the University of Virginia and coauthor of the study. Being admired by many doesn't replace the experience of deep and supportive friendships, which appear to have long-lasting, life-affirming effects. ■

Bonnie Knox, LCPC, CADC, provides individual and family therapy to adolescents and adults. In addition to treating depression and anxiety disorders along with addictions, she specializes in offering EMDR services.

Building Friendship Skills

GINA WAS AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD girl who struggled with social shyness and was hesitant to initiate conversations with her peers. Tony, a 10-year-old boy, wasn't shy in the least, but found it challenging to enter social situations without interrupting or annoying his peers.

While these two kids couldn't be more different, they share the need for some coaching in the area of friendship skills. If you find that your kids could use some guidance in how they interact with peers, keep in mind that consulting with a good child therapist can be very helpful. However, there are some things you can do at home to get the ball rolling.

1 Listen. Take the time to really listen to what is going on with your child's friendships, from the fun moments at birthday parties to the times when a game ended in anger.

See if you can identify the types of situations that most often end up with a less than desirable outcome.

- 2 Make a plan.** When you have found a situation that your child wants to be able to handle more effectively, devise a simple plan. The plan will consist of things to think, say, and/or do and should include between three to five steps. Keep it simple and straightforward. For example, if the plan was for how to start a conversation, the steps might be:
- a. Choose a good time.
 - b. Make a greeting.
 - c. Ask a question or make a comment about...
 - i. The other person
 - ii. A shared experience
 - iii. A current event

Write the steps down for future reference and discuss the details involved in each step (e.g., what

does it mean to play in a friendly way?).

3 Practice together. The final step is to practice the plan together with your child. Have your child pretend to be the other kid and you act out the steps, giving your child a realistic picture of how the steps look in action. Then switch roles, with your child acting out the steps. Give your child positive feedback as well as corrective pointers to help him or her master the steps.

When you take the time to listen, plan, and practice important friendship skills with your kids, you will help them build not only their social skills, but their social confidence—and in case you were wondering, that's a good thing. ■

Todd Cartmell, PsyD, is a child psychologist and author of 8 Simple Tools for Raising Great Kids.