



Supportive relationships play a vital role in helping us achieve goals, overcome obstacles and lead a happy, fulfilling life. People who find it hard to forge solid bonds with loyal friends may be more likely to suffer from loneliness, stress and depression. Use this checklist to help build positive friendships.

Find common ground and build on it

A good starting point for any supportive friendship is to discover what you have in common. That can be quite a straightforward process – often, the very act of meeting a new person can reveal some kind of mutual association. Perhaps you work together, have a mutual friend or live in the same neighbourhood. These kinds of situations are natural conversation starters and an easy way to start finding out about other things that might draw you together.

Respect the other person's individuality

No two people are alike – we all bring our own unique set of abilities and viewpoints to a friendship. That means that however much you find in common with someone else, it's very likely that you'll also have major differences. Restrain yourself from trying to change the other person in any way. Rather, recognise that your friend may have different values, interests and goals to you, and respect that.

Create and share positive experiences

The more enjoyable time we spend with someone, the more we come to associate them with positive experiences, which makes us want to take the friendship forward. Some people have a tendency to complain a lot, which means that instead of creating positive experiences they tend to spread negativity. Not surprisingly, such people have a much more difficult time building friendships. The good news is that there are endless ways to share positive experiences: you could go to a movie, listen to music or attend a local event. What you choose to do is up to you, but the important thing is to focus on having a good time together.

Be a good listener

Sometimes the best thing a friend can do is to simply listen. Everyone has their ups and downs, and it can really make a difference to communicate worries and frustrations to someone who genuinely cares. This does not mean giving advice necessarily, or jumping in with a story of your own hard times. It may not even be necessary to offer sympathy or pity. Instead, aim to simply give your friend your undivided attention, so they feel they've been heard.

Help your friend to thrive

An important characteristic of supportive friendships is helping each other to grow and thrive. Try to articulate the positive traits you see in the other person, and encourage them to pursue what they are good at and make the best of their talents and strengths. Most people seek to improve their quality of life, and when they find a friend who is willing to help them do this, they appreciate the support.