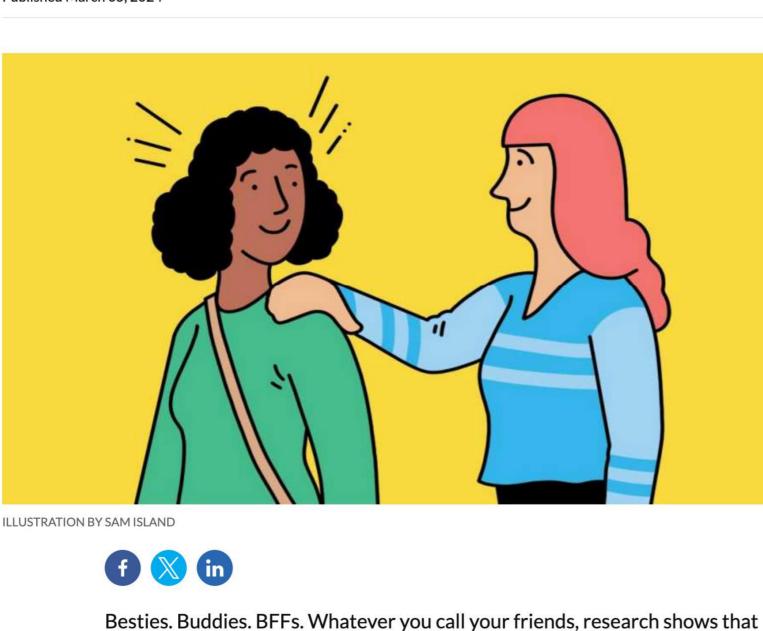
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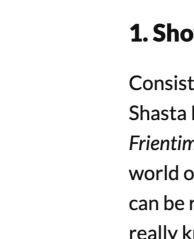
25 Great Ways to Be a Better Friend How initiating plans, celebrating your pals and going on friend dates can strengthen and deepen your relationships



reducing stress, depression and loneliness and even helping your physical wellbeing. And yet, it can be easy to take friendships for granted. Like plants that need water, friendships require nurturing and care in order to flourish. With

that in mind, we've curated a list of 25 ways to strengthen your platonic relationships. When you're done, please share your own friendship wisdom in the comments section at the bottom of the page. **Switch to Automatic Renewal** Flash Sale! Limited Time Offer Two more years of membership. Only \$20 when you switch to automatic renewal! Plus, a FREE gift! Switch Today >

adult friendships are major sources of health and happiness, capable of



1. Show up regularly Consistent time together is a fundamental requirement of friendship, says Shasta Nelson, who has written three books on friendship, including Frientimacy: How to Deepen Friendships for Lifelong Health and Happiness. In a

demand.

world of ghosting and flaking, the simple act of showing up on a regular basis can be revelatory. "If you don't connect very often, then you won't feel like you really know what's going on in each other's lives," Nelson says. Writer, speaker and lawyer Justin Whitmel Earley, who wrote Made for People: Why We Drift into Loneliness and How to Fight for a Life of Friendship, believes that even a text message establishes the kind of consistent presence that strong friendships 2. Be vulnerable

Healthy friendships require vulnerability because it makes friends feel seen and loved, Nelson says. Speaker and writer Bailey T. Hurley, author of *Together* is a Beautiful Place: Finding, Keeping and Loving Our Friends, recommends preparing questions and conversation starters to give interactions with friends more depth. "The two base foundations of friendship are trust and emotional support, and you can't really do either of those without talking about things that really matter," Hurley says. Earley also suggests you go deeper with what you're willing to share. "Vulnerability catalyzes vulnerability," he says. "If you disclose something you've been worrying about or something that embarrasses you, people will usually say, 'I'm so honored you told me that, and I actually have something I'd like to share with you, too."

3. Initiate plans

When she was writing her forthcoming book, Modern Friendship: How to Nurture Our Most Valued Connections, journalist and author Anna Goldfarb conducted an informal online survey on friendship of a few hundred people. She discovered that what people want most from friends is for them to initiate. "What that tells me is that you can make someone feel really good just by reaching out to them," Goldfarb says. Nelson agrees. "We associate a friend reaching out to us as evidence that we are a priority in their lives, that they are thinking of us and that they like us," she explains. "When we feel like they aren't reaching out to us, we wonder if we matter to them." The best initiators don't just initiate contact and communication, but also social plans and gettogethers. 4. Talk, but also listen

In many friendships, there's a talker and a listener — someone who typically

dominates the conversation and someone who usually takes a back seat. In the

people need to be sharing what's going on in their life. If you're the talker ... the

only way [your friends] are going to feel close to you is if you start giving them

opportunities to be brave and say, 'Hey I wanted to be sure to tell you about ..."

through ahead of time what you want to be sure to share [and] look for

best friendships, however, everyone takes a turn. According to Nelson, "Both

more space to talk. That means becoming comfortable with quiet pauses, learning to actively listen without interrupting and asking follow-up questions. If you're the listener ... you, too, deserve to be heard and seen. Maybe think

5. Have more fun Simply put, friends should have fun together. "All too often, we are in relationships that are low in positivity. There is a lack of enjoyment, fun and laughter," Nelson says. "It might be time to look and see how the pattern of complaining [when you're together] can be shifted, or how you two might find something fun to do together again, or explore ways to bring more inspiration into your time together. The best relationships are those that have so much positive emotions that we truly enjoy being together."

Friends want to be appreciated, says writer, director and producer Rachel

health advocate. "It's so important to express gratitude to your friends for

Winter, coauthor of Stay Golden, Girls: Friendship is the New Marriage, which she

wrote with her longtime friend Rachel Steinman, a writer, teacher and mental

being in your life. Tell them that you care about them in any way that you can,"

urges Winter, who says gratitude is most impactful when it's specific — that is,

when you thank friends for specific things they've done or for specific traits

appreciate them and look forward to seeing them soon. "It's letting people

know that you cherish the friendship," she says.

7. Don't give unsolicited advice

they have. Gratitude is especially important during periods of absence. When

life gets busy, Hurley recommends making a quick phone call to tell friends you

Often, one friend dominates the other, says Goldfarb, who points to those who

give unsolicited advice. For example, telling a stressed-out friend that they

know your life better than you." Instead of advice, what friends often want

stressors don't need immediate fixing. They just need someone to witness them

someone can say things like 'I know that feeling' ... we feel seen and accepted."

when they share their struggles or worries is validation. "Most of our life

and tell us we're OK to be feeling what we're feeling," Nelson says. "When

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6. Show gratitude

should try yoga, that they should see your massage therapist or that they should change their diet because it worked for you. "That's just oppressive," Goldfarb says. "People don't want to be dominated like that ... It feels like, 'I

important as quick confrontation.

9. Extinguish envy

8. Embrace conflict — and forgiveness Friends fight. If you handle them with grace and empathy, arguments that might otherwise weaken friendships can actually strengthen them, says writer and performer Jezz Chung, author of This Way to Change: A Gentle Guide to Personal Transformation and Collective Liberation. "Speaking up about something that bothers me — while also growing my tolerance for occasional disappointment helps me learn more about myself and the person I'm in a relationship with," they say. To make conflict productive, address it immediately, advises journalist and publisher Will Schwalbe, author of the friendship memoir We Should Not Be Friends: The Story of a Friendship, who says collecting grievances is toxic to friendship. "One of the rules I have with my friends is: If I'm irritated with you, you'll know within 30 seconds," he says, adding that quick forgiveness is just as

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relationships, Group: How One Therapist and a Circle of Strangers Saved My Life, she began thinking about her next one and decided that B.F.F.: A Memoir of Friendship Lost and Found should be about her friendships with women, which

When writer and essayist Christie Tate was finishing her book on romantic

she'd always struggled with. "I knew my female relationships were just as rich

and vital — and messy," says Tate, who soon thereafter discovered the root of

bring my full self to my friendships because I was so on guard and so defensive,"

she says. Once she realized this, she confessed to her friends, who were able to

lift the curtain on their lives in ways that corrected Tate's assumptions about

them. What's more, she was able to recognize her toxic behaviors. "I learned

how to call myself out and tell people, 'I realize that I'm jealous of your other

removed my tiny little habit of blaming other people. Because it's not other

people's job to make me feel safe or secure. It's my job."

relationships, and that it's getting in the way. I'm working on it," Tate says. "That

her failed and floundering female friendships: envy and jealousy. "I couldn't

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10. Remember their birthday (and more) Across time and distance, birthday wishes are an easy way to show you care. "I have an old friend who sends me a birthday text every single year. Even if we haven't spoken all year, he still remembers my birthday and sends me so much love on that day. Plus, it becomes a great way for us to reconnect and catch up, even when life gets in the way," says Lane Moore, author of You Will Find Your People: How to Make Meaningful Friendships as an Adult and host of the I Thought It Was Just Me podcast. To really strengthen your friendships, also make note of other important dates, suggests Goldfarb, who marks on her calendar the anniversaries of important losses in friends' lives — the loss of a parent, for example, or a pet. "It costs you nothing to send someone a text message saying, 'I know today's a tough day for you. I'm thinking of you.' It shows that you're paying attention," she says.

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11. Offer to help

their goals. That's the key, because people will keep you close if you're supporting them," explains Goldfarb, who regularly asks, "How can I help you?" "Friends love to hear that, because that's what we want our friends to do — we want friends who will be our teammates." 12. Accept help Receiving help is just as important in friendships as giving it, according to Steinman, who says asking for help shows your friends that you trust them and gives them an opportunity to show up for you. "Asking for help is not weak. It's actually very brave," Steinman says. "It shows that you need that person, which creates a deeper connection and can actually boost your friend's confidence. Because we all want to feel needed." 13. Give them space

Good friends should challenge each other, but they also should respect each

other's boundaries. And sometimes, that means giving people space. "I learned

this recently," says Winter, who recalls a friend who felt like their relationship

was unbalanced. "She was not feeling good about herself, and my strength was

didn't want to always feel like the weak one. So, she took some space from me."

Although it's OK to give friends space, don't let them drift too far. "Stay close.

Let the friend know, 'I'm here for you when you're ready to talk," Winter says.

In other words, leave the door open, but let them linger on the other side of it

recommends planning a formal friend date that includes special activities you

When Sheila Liming, associate professor at Champlain College in Burlington,

Vermont, and author of Hanging Out: The Radical Power of Killing Time, thinks of

strong friendships, she thinks of Finnish artist Tove Jansson and her longtime

World War II, Konikoff was forced to emigrate to the United States. For years

Jansson continued — albeit in writing. "They had this long-standing friendship

relationships." While letters might seem passé, that's exactly what makes them

special, according to Liming, who recommends following Jansson's example by

handwritten and delivered in the mail — it catches your attention in the way an

that took place only over letters for a decade," says Liming. "To me, it's just a

really great example of the way that correspondence can be sustaining for

writing a letter: "When you get a letter from someone — something that's

friend Eva Konikoff. When Finland invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 during

thereafter, as chronicled in the book *Letters from Tove*, her friendship with

Dates can be just as special for friends as they are for lovers. Winter

not providing her comfort. Instead, it was making her agitated because she

The best friends typically have servant hearts, according to Goldfarb, who says

it's important to help your friends achieve their goals. If a friend is trying to be

healthier, for example, you might offer to be their exercise buddy. Or if a friend

is taking a trip to France, you could offer to help them study their French. "The

best strategy for making and keeping friendships is to help your friends with

know your friend will love — like a day at the spa, a reservation at their favorite restaurant or tickets to a show they've been dying to see. "You would do that with someone you wanted to show more interest in romantically. Why not do it with someone you want to show more interest in platonically?" Winter asks. 15. Write a letter

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16. Celebrate your "friendversary"

experiences like that are so powerful."

overwhelmed by life.

19. Be a connector

20. Answer their texts

DUNK

18. Surprise them with souvenirs

for as long as they need to.

14. Go on a friend date

email or text message doesn't."

Along with date nights, another ritual friends should borrow from romantic

friendversary. "Every year, my friend and I celebrate the day that we met,"

another for the friendship. And then we shared gifts and went and did

together having that uninterrupted time to build connection and make

couples is the anniversary, suggests Hurley, who recently celebrated a 10-year

Hurley says. "This year, we found all these pictures of our friendship and did a

little friendship slideshow. We also wrote letters to each other thanking one

something really fun — we took a trip to Santa Monica. It was so nice to be

memories, just like you would for a real anniversary with your spouse. Shared

17. Give the gift of time and attention When she was pregnant in 2023, Nia Liu of Fairview, Utah, went viral on TikTok for a video she posted about her "nesting party." "My best friend wanted to throw me a baby shower, but I don't like baby showers," says Liu, who suggested that her friends help her with her pre-baby to-do list — things like decluttering the kitchen and organizing the nursery. "She invited the list of people I wanted there, and they thought it was a great idea. They came with dinner and treats they all brought a couple of freezer meals — and we just partied and cleaned. It was awesome. It was so much better than getting gifts. It was their time and

their attention and their willingness to help me prepare for this baby. It felt like

so much love was given to me." The same idea could be equally touching for a

friend who's moving, a friend who's ill or grieving, or a friend who is just feeling

Gifts are tangible expressions of the intangible feelings you have for people you

love. They're especially meaningful when they're unexpected, says Schwalbe,

treasured friendships. In particular, he likes to surprise his closest friends with

what he calls "edible souvenirs," such as saltwater taffy from the boardwalk

visiting a foreign country. "When I'm on a trip, I will buy something en masse

Instead of being selfish and trying to keep your friends to yourself, be generous

about connecting them to other people with whom you think they'll get along,

suggests Hurley, who says introducing people from disparate friend circles is

good social karma and a positive way to be of service — especially when you

don't have as much time for your friends as you'd like. "I'm someone who likes

to have a lot of friends in my life. But in reality, I can really only manage maybe

season of plenty when it comes to friendships ... try to find ways to bring all of

outside of you." For example, you could host a potluck, a lunch or a tea. "Instead

your friend groups together so people can make connections for themselves

four close friendships at a time," Hurley admits. "If you feel like you're in a

of filling your calendar with all these different dates, you're using your

superpower of friendliness to help other people connect," Hurley says.

when he's vacationing at the beach or a locally made candy bar when he's

who notes that out-of-the-blue gifts are an opportunity to give thanks for

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that is of that place that I can give to friends. Nothing fancy, just a little something," Schwalbe explains. "Edible souvenirs are great because they don't stress people out. It's not a vase or a T-shirt. It says you thought of them, but it doesn't create an obligation where they feel like they have to reciprocate."

Text messages can be incredibly convenient, but sometimes also incredibly annoying, and you might be tempted to ignore texts and answer them later in the day, later in the week or, if you're really overwhelmed, later in the month. What you might not realize, however, is that ignoring a text is tantamount to ignoring the friend who sent it, says Goldfarb, who recommends having a triage system for text messages. Texts from acquaintances or lesser friends are OK to ignore for a day or two. But texts from your closest friends? "If you're one of my best friends ... it means that I will respond to your text messages as soon as they come in, if I can," Goldfarb says.

21. Be a friend to friends' friends Treat members of your friends' inner circle the same way that you treat members of your own, even if you've never met them. "One way I put this into

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM ISLAND

might be an opportunity for me to make a new friendship, too." 22. Signal commitment There's a reason couples cohabitate or get married: Making a commitment helps your significant other feel loved and secure. You should be as willing to give that gift to your friends as you are to your partner, suggests Earley, who recommends making what he calls "gestures of commitment." Instead of an empty promise to hang out again soon, a gesture of commitment is declaring, "I really enjoy it when we get together. Let's do this every month" — and then actually doing it. Earley, for instance, has a standing hangout every other Tuesday with two friends, standing cocktail dates with various other friends about once per quarter and a monthly dinner date with his wife and another couple. "It's about signaling to friends that you want to stick around," continues

Earley, who says gifts also can signal commitment — like a ticket to a concert

that takes place a year from now, or the bottle of scotch he received from one

friend as thanks for being a groomsman in his wedding. "On the top of the

action is with my long-distance friends — the friends who don't live in the same

city as me," says Schwalbe, who lives in New York City. If a friend tells him that

"And if I can't do that — because we all live busy lives — I will say, 'Do they need

any restaurant recommendations? Can I tell them a really fun thing to do in the

city? Can I give them my five favorite things to do on a Saturday afternoon?' ...

This allows me to do something nice for you by looking after your friend, and it

someone they know is visiting, he'll offer to meet them for dinner or a drink.

bottle written in Sharpie marker was '2035,' which he said is the year that we'll open it and drink it together ... it was this incredibly meaningful moment because he expected to still be around to drink this bottle of scotch with me." 23. Put your phone away

When you're apart from your closest friends, answering their text messages shows them how important they are to you. When you're with them, however, being on your phone sends the opposite signal, according to Hurley, who stresses the importance of giving friends your undivided attention. "If you want to be a better friend, you need to get that phone out of sight," she says, adding that phones should be put away entirely — not just face down in front of you. "There have been studies showing that even if a phone is turned off, just having it out on the table changes the conversation you're having because people assume you're not paying attention. The things you talk about never get deep because there's this distraction hanging over you." 24. Master the art of following up Words between friends shouldn't evaporate. Instead, they should materialize in the form of meaningful action, says Hurley. When a friend shares something that's important and actionable, she sets a reminder on her phone to follow up. For example, if a friend says they have to have a hard conversation at work,

25. Change things up Friends don't like to be pigeonholed. One of the best gifts you can give a friend is the gift of versatility, Schwalbe suggests. "A really cool thing that I try to do with friends is, every now and then I'll try to change up our mode," he says. "If there's a friend who I always go to bars with, I'll say, 'Hey, I know we always go to bars, but do you want to go to a museum with me?' ... It acknowledges that we contain multitudes. If you happen to go to bars all the time, after a while your friend thinks, 'Does he think all I do is drink?' So, when you invite them to a museum to see an exhibit you think they might enjoy, that can be a huge compliment." Changing things up can be especially powerful with old friends who go back years. "One danger with old friends is that you can only rehash the past with them for so long. When you change up the routine you have with them, you're reinventing the friendship. You're giving yourselves new experiences and new fodder for things to talk about."

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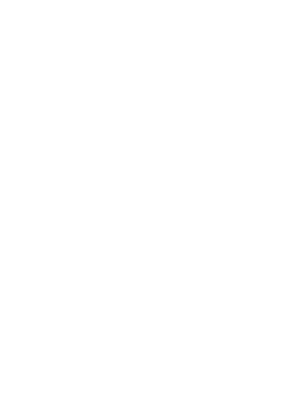


















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which boasts three. You can reach him on his website, MattAlderton.com.

Matt Alderton has written about everything from classic cars and climate change to farming

she'll set a reminder to ask them later how it went. Hurley recently took a special trip with her family, and when she told her friends about it, they surprised her with a gift on the payment app Venmo. "They said, 'We hope you have so much fun on your trip. Here's money for cocktails," Hurley recalls. "I just love the thoughtfulness, the action and the follow-through."

robots and fighter jets for publications such as USA Today, The Washington Post and Forbes. Originally from Denver, which boasts 300 days of sunshine a year, he now resides in Chicago,