The 13 Essential Traits of Good Friends

These are the keys to maintaining long-term connections.

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Some people have an easier time establishing and maintaining friendships than others. And some of us long for closer friendships or try to figure out why an existing or promising relationship fizzled out. In these cases, we may jump first to judge a friend's behavior, rather than our own. Perhaps we forget that relationships rely on mutual interactions. It is important, them, to examine our own contribution to the dynamics of a friendship. It is only our own behavior that we can change, and there are certain personal characteristics it's essential to cultivate to build healthy, lasting friendships.

The 13 Essential Friendship Traits

How much you agree with each statement?

1. I am trustworthy.
2. I am honest with others.
3. I am generally very dependable.
4. I am loyal to the people I care about.
5. I am easily able to trust others.
6. I experience and express empathy for others.
7. I am able to be non-judgmental.
8. I am a good listener.
9. I am supportive of others in their good times.
10. I am supportive of others in their bad times.
11. I am self-confident.
12. I am usually able to see the humor in life.
13. I am fun to be around.

These traits fall into three general categories, each representing an essential aspect of relational behavior. If you find that you disagree with many of the statements, you may struggle to develop meaningful, lasting friendships.

Below is a description of how each trait influences relationships, organized by the realm of behavioral expectations in which it falls:

Traits of Integrity

These qualities, represented by the first 5 traits on the list above, are related to core values held by most cultures—**trustworthiness**, **honesty**, **dependability**, **loyalty**, and, as an interrelated quality, **the ability to trust others**.

- *Trustworthiness* is often the "make or break" element in any interpersonal relationship. Any breach, regardless of perceived magnitude, can devastate a relationship. Trustworthiness is comprised of several components, including honesty, dependability, and loyalty, and while each is important to successful relationships, honesty and dependability have been identified as the *most* vital in the realm of friendships.
- *Honesty* requires that we speak openly from the heart and incorporate objectivity into our words.
- Being *dependable* means that friends can count on you to be there when you say you will, to do what you say you will, and to be willing to stand up for friends, especially when they can't stand up for themselves. If you are as likely to let friends down as come through for them, the relationship often becomes superficial, less engaging, and even resentment-provoking, if it doesn't end altogether.

- *Loyalty* is valued early on in all of our relationships, from the time we make our first friendships. We need friends who won't spill our secrets to others, gossip about us, or allow others to criticize us.
- *Being able to trust* another person involves being comfortable with vulnerability. If you have difficulty sharing your authentic self with a friend, it is doubtful your friend will be easily willing to do this for you.

Traits of Caring

These qualities, represented by the traits listed as numbers 6 to 10 above, includes **empathy**, **the ability to withhold judgment**, effective **listening skills**, and **the ability to offer support** in good times and bad. These traits require personal insight, self-discipline, and unconditional positive regard for our friends.

- *Empathy* is the ability to understand what is going on with a friend, to recognize how he or she is feeling, and to interact and respond accordingly.
- The ability to be *non-judgmental* reflects our ease in accepting a friend's choices, regardless of how they may differ from our own.
- *Good listening skills* are essential to allow the communicating of intimate thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This sharing is a gradual process of give and take that deepens over time.
- Being *supportive of others in their bad times* is a defining quality of a good friend, but *being supportive of others in their good times* is also essential. The saying goes, "Everybody loves a winner," but for some of us, this just isn't so. If you have trouble celebrating another's good fortune and experience envy or even bitterness, this may limit the depth of your friendships.

Traits of Congeniality

This group, representing by the final three traits listed above, includes **self-confidence**, **the ability to see the humor in life**, and **being fun to be around**. This trio of traits has also been associated with overall well-being and happiness in life.

- *Self-confidence* is an appealing characteristic in any friend, and may even be contagious. When we are in the company of self-confident individuals, we typically feel our own confidence rise.
- People who are *fun to be around* are better company than friends who walk around with a dark cloud hanging over their heads. The former enjoy life, handle challenges in proactive ways, and keep negative experiences in perspective.
- People who have the *ability to see the humor in life* help us deal with the curveballs (or spitballs) life tosses at us. We all benefit from friends who are able to keep us from taking life too seriously.

Before You Can Increase Your Friendship Quotient, You Must Admit That the Need Exists

Remember: Everyone brings a different level of the 13 traits to their relationships. However, the very best friends offer a generous helping of this baker's dozen. Take an honest look at your own behaviors and see if you need to raise your "friendship quotient" to raise the likelihood of maintaining the close connections you desire.