

Deepening Current Relationships

When thinking about improving your social life, start by looking at your *existing* social network. Of the people you already know, are there any you would like to know better?

How do you deepen a relationship? Well, you've done this already with a lot of people in your life. You probably know the things that have helped bring you closer to people in the past. Listed below are some ideas that may be familiar to you. Put a check mark beside those you think you need to work on.

One principle deserves special consideration:

Make your relationships a priority.

"You can play with your friends when your chores are done." Were you raised with this rule? It may have worked well for you in childhood. Recognize, however, that you are now an adult. Your chores are *never* going to be done. Ever. And if you're hanging on to this rule, you will never get to socialize with anyone. If you are ever going to get to *"play with your friends,"* then your social life has to be given higher priority daily tasks like washing dishes, or to solitary activities like reading or watching television.

_____ **Regularity helps.** And absence can make the heart forget. Strive for reasonably regular contact with the people who mean the most to you. Some people set up regular meetings, like a weekly squash game or a monthly lunch.

_____ **Open up.** When talking about topics like movies, work, or local events, get a bit more personal about yourself. Briefly share your own feelings, opinions, or experiences. *"When I saw that it reminded me of how I felt when...."* Then give the other person a chance to open up a bit in turn. If they do, show interest and open up some more. If they don't, give it some time and do it again. Gradually you may find that the relationship gets stronger.

_____ **Allow closeness without pushing it.** Friendships are voluntary. But friends are so valuable that it can be tempting to grab hold of them, using guilt or pressure to keep them nearby. Unfortunately, this usually has the effect of driving them off. Getting together, talking about personal matters, and having fun all work better if they come from an open invitation rather than a sense of obligation.

_____ **Intimacy equals vulnerability.** Being open with someone takes trust and a sense of safety. Express your acceptance of friends as they are. Acknowledge differences without pushing them to change to suit you. Allow them to be themselves, and let go of the temptation to try to make them think or act the way you do.

_____ **No bumping.** It can be easy to forget about friends when you develop a new romantic relationship or go through a stressful period. Although you may want to scale back your social commitments occasionally, maintain reasonably regular contact with your friends.

_____ **Combine activities.** In a busy life it can be hard to find time for friends. One way to manage this is to socialize and get something else done at the same time. If you have to shop for clothes, invite a friend to go with you. Exercise together. Carpool. Form a reading group. Some friends get together to buy groceries, work on home improvement projects, watch television, or do baking.

_____ **Keep a wide focus.** One good friend can be a big help in your life, but one is seldom enough. Try to maintain your friendships with a number of people rather than spending all of your time with one person.

Think about your current social network. Identify at least two people you'd like to know better. Identify *who* the person is, approximately *how often* you see them, and *what* you usually do when you are together. Then try to come up with some ideas about how you could *improve* your relationship with them. This might involve seeing them more often, doing different activities (specify what they are), relating in a different way, or talking about certain issues. Be as specific as you can.

Who? _____ **How Often?** _____

What do you do now? _____

Improve? _____

Who? _____ **How Often?** _____

What do you do now? _____

Improve? _____
