

# Different Friendship Types Can Support Us Through Life

*Positive Aging Thought Leader: Maria Olsen*



*The connection between social engagement and quality of life has been well-documented.*

Loneliness can take a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, the truth of which was underscored for many of us during the pandemic. Humans thrive when they feel a sense of belonging. Everyone needs at least one friend.

## Friendships Sustain Us Throughout Our Entire Lives:

According to [Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith](#), in Washington, D.C., “Friendships sustain us throughout our entire lives. While we may not be able to choose our families of origin, we can choose our friends. They are great treasures

in our lives, and can see us through the tough times when no one else can.”

Dr. Gadhia Smith acknowledges that “some friends are for a moment, some for a season, and some for a lifetime.” Not all friendships are meant to be permanent, because we are all imperfect humans, and relationships can ebb and flow in accordance with our circumstances in life.

Many of us made friends when raising our children, sometimes based on the parents of children to which our sons and daughters gravitated, or what activities our kids participated in or schools they attended. Sometimes these friendships wither after our children become adults. If they do, we can be challenged to find other friendships as adults.

*“These relationships may or may not be deep, but certainly can help us to enjoy our time more in the workplace.”*

Friendships often are formed at work. These relationships may or may not be deep, but certainly can help us to enjoy our time more in the workplace. Sometimes, these relationships are somewhat at arms-length, but that is ok, and may be even advisable in a workplace setting.

#### Ways That Help Us Stay In Touch:

When we travel, we often make friends on the road. These can enhance our experiences, especially if the friend is local to the place we are visiting and can provide insight into the culture with which we may not be familiar.

When I have gone on retreats, especially with only women, the friendships formed there have been intense, because we are seeking self-improvement during such ventures, and often open up to others participating in the retreats. These friendships can be gratifying, but do not frequently extend long beyond the trip. Social media, What’s App, texts, and email can

prolong these friendships of the road, of course. These methods can help us stay in touch until our paths may cross again.

Joining groups, organizations and places of worship are fine ways to form friendships. Presumably, people who join a given venture share some common interests. Meetups can be fruitful ways to cultivate new relationships, especially when you are in a new place.

I have enjoyed hiking meetups from time to time and have made friends during these outings. Taking classes also are rich environments for connection. Many colleges provide continuing education opportunities at no or reduced cost. A writing class I attended resulted in some lasting connections.

### A Warmth-Inducing Experience:

Perhaps the most gratifying relationships are longtime friendships. Many of my closest friends are those with whom I attended high school or graduate school, who have known me at my best and worst. Having someone to help us navigate stressful events in our lives is obviously important. My friends and I have leaned on each other through divorces, serious illnesses, and challenges in life, and I am so thankful that they remained by my side without judgment.

My experience with childhood friends is that just thinking of them can bring bouts of reminiscence and seeing them again is usually a warmth-inducing experience. Reunions often can re-ignite such friendships.

Of course, breakups with friends can be painful. Sometimes they occur naturally, with distance or changes in life circumstances. They need not be fatal, however, because new friendships are within reach, if we make the effort to find and build them.

*“our friendships play a key role in the development of our identities.”*

### Friendships Require Attention:

A sense of belonging is critical to our well-being. Studies show, however, that we take on characteristics of those with whom we spend the most time. Dr. Gadhia-Smith confirms that “our friendships play a key role in the development of our identities. As we absorb and become like the people we choose to bring into our lives.”

If we hang out with big drinkers, for example, we are likely to imbibe more. If our closest friends possess negative mindsets, we also may skew negative in our thinking. So I try to surround myself with positive people who support, encourage, and bring out the best in me.

Whatever friendships you have, take time to [nurture the important ones](#). Be a good listener and provide support when needed. Check in with your friends. Like anything else, to keep them healthy and growing, friendships require attention. Time is our most precious commodity, so think about with whom you would like to share it. As 17th century novelist, Miguel de Cervantes said in *Don Quixote* said, “*Tell me your company, and I will tell you what you are.*”

*Did you enjoy this article? Become a [Kuel Life Member](#) today to support our Community. [Sign-up](#) for our Sunday newsletter and get your content delivered straight to your inbox.*