

Abby's Journal: How To Recognize True, Genuine Friendships

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08/19/2024

Abby's Journal | 8 Ways to Recognize Authentic, Genuine, Female Friendships



With the value of romantic relationships being so heavily emphasized in the world (and on our blog!), sometimes finding genuine friendships gets overlooked. I don't think enough people even know what to look for in friendships, with friends often taking a backseat when a romantic partner gets involved. I'll be writing about my experiences specifically with female friendships, what I have learned about the ones that last and the qualities of a good friend that outweigh the others.

Mutual Support and Encouragement

Growing up, I had my fair share of female friends that I didn't feel support me. I never felt like my successes were celebrated; instead I just felt like a sidekick to their lives, where their needs, their successes and their accomplishments were more important than my own. As I've gotten older and found friends that have cheered me on with both my big and little successes, it's opened my eyes to what a true friend should be. After noticing the

contrast between the two, I've tried to be the kind of friend who celebrates my friends freely.

Support also means sticking around when the going gets tough and it's not all sunshine and rainbows. I've had friends that disappear as soon as I feel like I'm growing into myself, or when I've gone through trials that "changed" me, but my truest friends continue to see me through all of my transitions.

Honesty

Finding friends that can be honest and real with you even when it might be hard to hear are signs of a genuine friendship. Keep in mind, there's still a time and place for everything! Advice should still be solicited and there's a way to communicate difficult truths in constructive and kind ways, but your friends should always be open with you. For me, having friends that I can trust to be real with me are a sign of a true friendship. Honesty in a friendship helps to draw the line between true and superficial connections.

This honesty extends to feedback on all aspects of life, whether it's about your behavior, decisions, or even your outfit if it's for an important event. A genuine friend cares about your well-being and will offer advice or opinions that are in your best interest and never out of jealousy or ill-intent.

Accepting You Always

In a world where we often feel pressured to fit in or conform, especially in our day and age with social media bombarding us, genuine friendships provide a space for authenticity. A real friend will always accept you for who you are, what you look like, how you dress, your mood, all without judgment or expectation. They should embrace your quirks, flaws and unique personality traits, appreciating you for the individual that you are.

This acceptance is so important in female friendships, where societal pressures can sometimes create unrealistic standards. I've been in female friend groups before where I felt like I needed to dress or look a certain way to fit in, and once I felt like I found my true friends, it didn't matter in the slightest. I am able to fully be myself, no matter the occasion, and feel accepted. In a real friendship, there's no need to pretend or hide who you are.

Time and Effort

Maintaining a real friendship must have mutual effort from both sides. Once you feel like you're the only one ever reaching out, it might be time to go. However, some friendships are able to withstand time and distance with little communication! Every friendship looks different. At the end of the day, there should be a mutual understanding that both of you care to maintain the relationship. This can be through regular communication, spending time together, or just supporting each other's endeavors, even if from afar.

Emotional Support

In some friendships, I've found that emotional support was rarely mutual. In a genuine friendship, there is a balance in emotional labor and you're both willing to build each other up.

If you find that your friendship involves a lot of giving on your part, but little reciprocation from the other side, it might be worth reassessing the relationship. A true friendship is built on mutual care and concern, with both parties contributing to the emotional well-being of the other.

Shared Joy in Each Other's Happiness

Be happy for your friends! In a friendship, there should be a shared joy in each other's happiness and success. There's no room for jealousy or resentment when one friend achieves something significant. Their happiness should be yours and yours should be theirs. This shared joy is such a huge factor in knowing whether or not you've found a good friend. In a true friendship, you don't just tolerate each other's successes; you celebrate them! Whether it's a new job, a relationship, or a personal accomplishment, learning to be happy for the people around you will come back to bless you in return.

The Ability to Grow Together

As people, we're always evolving, and in a true friendship, both individuals support each other's growth and change. You're not just friends because of who you were in the past, but because of who you're becoming. You should always remember this.

This mutual growth might involve learning from each other or trying new things together, or simply supporting

each other's personal development. The ability to evolve together is what keeps the friendship strong over time.

True friendships stand the test of time. It's totally normal for friendships and relationships to go through lulls or periods of ups and downs, but genuine friendships have a resilience that allows them to endure all tests of time. One of my favorite quotes is from the author Heidi Priebe and it says:

"To love someone long-term is to attend a thousand funerals of the people they used to be. The people they're too exhausted to be any longer. The people they don't recognise inside themselves anymore. The people they grew out of, the people they never ended up growing into. We so badly want the people we love to get their spark back when it burns out; to become speedily found when they are lost.

But it is not our job to hold anyone accountable to the people they used to be. It is our job to travel with them between each version and to honour what emerges along the way. Sometimes it will be an even more luminescent flame. Sometimes it will be a flicker that disappears and temporarily floods the room with a perfect and necessary darkness."

Hearing this for the first time deeply resonated with me. It takes a kind of deep bond to see someone through all of their life changes, even the worst ones, but this type of love in a friendship transcends any superficial bonds. This type of connection will remain strong because it's rooted in something real and enduring.

Different Friends for Different Reasons

While I've written about what makes a good friend, I think it's important to note that some friends will check some boxes and some will check others. When I think of all of the friendships in my life, something I've noticed is that each friend serves their own unique purpose in my life and brings something special that nobody else can. I've learned throughout the years that not every one of my friends is going to check every box for me: some friends will be better listeners than others, while with others, I might be the primary listener. I have my friends that I can go out with on the weekends, and my friends that will be there when I want to chill at home. I have friends of all different backgrounds, life stories, religions, and more, so expecting them all to be the "ideal" friend in every way is simply asking too much. But that's the beauty of it all!

Learning to love people for who they are and not expecting them to be anything else.

Genuine female friendships are invaluable. They provide support, joy, and a sense of belonging that few other relationships can match. Your friends are the family that you choose and will usually be there before, after and through your romantic relationships. Choose wisely! As I look back at my life, the periods where I have been happiest are when I've had solid female friends. Recognizing these friendships involves knowing what true support and acceptance looks like, among other things. In a world where many relationships often have an emotional disconnect, nurturing and valuing these genuine connections is essential in living truly fulfilled.

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Justin Fague reviewed this article. To reach out, please email healthyrelationships@usu.edu.