



Mind: Celebrate Friendship Day: Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Body: Is Loneliness as Dangerous as Obesity and Smoking?

Spirit: Friendship

Celebrate Friendship Day Where Everybody Knows Your Name



The theme song from the hit sitcom, 'Cheers' got it right. "...sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came."

It is about being recognized and cared about. Social engagement and connection is important in every stage of our lives -- and is especially important as we grow older.

The first Sunday in August celebrates Friendship Day. Proclaimed in 1935 by the United States Congress, many countries have since embraced the tradition.

Being with a good friend just makes us feel better. As a matter of fact, research now suggests that people who remain connected and engaged, show reduced physical and cognitive decline, and actually live longer. While positive family relationships can be enriching, affirming friendships (other than our spouse and immediate children) tend to have an

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even greater bearing on our well-being.

Yet maintaining long-term friendships becomes more difficult with time. Retirement, family moves, and losses all contribute to a reduction of our social network. Indeed, my husband and I recently lost 4 of our closest 'inner circle' friends and 2 valued colleagues within a short 20 month period. With a physical move added to the mix, we had the challenge of creating a new 'social normal.'

Quantity versus Quality

It is not just more engagement -- it is about more quality engagement. Minutes in the presence of someone who gets you, appreciates you, and even challenges you to be all that you can be, is more powerful than hours spent with someone who doesn't see who you are. And ultimately, the shared moments that sometimes need no words can have the most profound effect.

Speaking of quality, research confirms that alone does not mean lonely. Many people who report feeling lonely are married or living with other people. It is the nature and nurture of the relationship that deepens our experience of bonding and contentment.

Tips to Consider this Friendship Day:

- Give most what you want most! If you feel you are not getting enough approval and encouragement -- it is probably a good

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indication that you need to give more approval and encouragement. If you want more respect and kindness -- yep -- you need to give more to others first. Soon you will notice in hindsight that you are getting it back and often tenfold in return. The trick is to not go looking for it ;-) -- easier said than done!

- Instead of noticing the potential for rejection (as chronically lonely people tend to do,) look for the many indications of acceptance we can find each day. A smile from a stranger, a kind word from a sales clerk. Search for and celebrate what is right in each other.
- Assume positive intentions on the other persons part. Very rarely do others set out to hurt or sabotage. We are typically so caught up in our own worlds, that we often fail to notice our impact on others.
- Above all -- don't sweat the small stuff! Ask yourself how important a perceived slight will be in the next 5 years, 5 weeks, or even 5 days.

In closing, I share a beloved vision of friendship as written by George Eliot:

"A friend is one to whom one may pour out the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that gentle hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away."

May we all offer these gentle hands to our 'cherished old' and 'waiting to be discovered'

friends. Wishing you a warm and rewarding Friendship Day!

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Is Loneliness as Dangerous as Obesity and Smoking?

University of Chicago social neuroscientist John Cacioppo's research reveals that chronically lonely people have a heightened perception of social threat. This elevated sense of threat can trigger a host of physiological responses, that overtime, can lead to a higher risk for high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, a diminished immune response, depression, sleep difficulties, cognitive decline and dementia.

Spirit



"A single rose can be my garden, a single friend my world."

Leo Buscaglia