

Outside Friendships

This course is about keeping the fires burning in your relationship. You've demonstrated your commitment to your relationship by getting to this point. In the last lesson, you learned about the need for personal space and how some need more space than others. In this lesson, we'll discuss friendships.

The best long-term partnerships are those which begin with friendship. At the beginning of relationships, people find it difficult to believe they need friendships other than their partner. It's time to delve into the need for other friends in addition to your partner.

The Need for Other Friendships

You and your partner are amazing people with gifts, talents, and interests. Some of those you have in common. They probably drew you together. Others you don't share. You may have an interest in some of your partner's interests, but not as strong as they have.

The key to having outside friendships is the comfort level you each have in sharing each other. If you use communication skills and fun rituals or games to keep your relationship strong, you'll be able to enjoy each of you having different friends.

Outside friendships give you variety as well as the opportunity to explore different aspects of yourself.

Consider these benefits:

1. **Add excitement to your life.** You each need time to explore your passion. In pursuing your interests, you'll meet different people you enjoy. Each friendship adds excitement to your life and expands your horizons, while adding to your fun as a couple.
 - For example, perhaps you're an avid marathon runner and your partner is an amateur chef and Food Network fan. When the big race comes, your partner will want to cheer you on. And who wouldn't want to share wonderful food?

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2. **Take a break.** As much as you love each other, there will be times you need a break. Sometimes you'll get on each other's nerves. Short breaks to engage in activities you enjoy gives the space needed and renews your friendship with each other.
 - Remember that introverts need more time alone. An extrovert will gravitate toward group experiences while an introvert will engage in more solitary or quiet experiences.
 - **Accept and enjoy your differing personal needs for activity and companionship.**

What Are Acceptable Friendships?

Some people are comfortable with their partner having friends of either gender, while others are not. This is an important area to discuss as there are differing needs and expectations. If one partner feels more strongly about this than the other, use your communication tools to sort out feelings and expectations.

Here are some possible areas for discussion:

1. **Friendship with someone the same gender as your partner can bring uncomfortable feelings to the surface.**
 - Are there any situations in which the two of you are comfortable with this? Perhaps it's fine if they are in a group setting but not alone for any length of time.
 - Are you comfortable with this if you're both with the friend?
 - A partner who was betrayed may be more skittish in this area.
 - A disagreement in this area can present major challenges. Use Reflective Listening or the clearing exercise to express your feelings. Being honest with each other will strengthen your intimacy.
2. **Friendship with someone the opposite gender of your partner may not be as difficult for one or both of you.**

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- If so, continue to use your communication skills to maintain ongoing awareness of any feelings that may change.

Every couple's experience has their own complexities, such as the sexual orientation of both partners as well as the sexual orientation of the friends. **The key is communication, trust, and mutual respect.**

What if Someone Feels Left Out

If either of you begins feeling left out of the other's life, it's time to sit down and do some reflective listening. Without realizing it, one of you could become so involved in your hobby that you accidentally forget how your partner is doing.

Also, situations change. You or your partner may need more time together now than previously.

The need for separate time changes depending upon:

- What's happening between the two of you
- Challenges in your extended families
- Work situations
- Personal challenges such as health, depression, or anxiety
- How much time you're spending with each other

If jealousy rears its head, honest communication is critical. The one who is jealous or feeling left out will benefit by the technique to discover how old you're feeling. The one who's being asked to curb their away time may also need to discover how old they feel.

Once you're clear about your own feelings and whether past issues are being triggered, you'll be able to have a more productive discussion.

Summary

As your relationship grows and develops, you'll each find the need to spend time with others. This could happen as a part of work or when you engage in different

