

Healthful Changes

Proven Strategies for Taking Charge of Your Life

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Life Goes Better With Friends

Everyone knows that friends make life better, but there is a growing body of evidence that shows people who have good friendships and strong social circles live longer—as well as happier—lives.

In study after study, researchers have found that those who have friends are less likely to become disabled and, if they do suffer a period of disability, more likely to recover. Further, people with fewer friendships are more likely to have a heart attack and to die as a result, while people with more social contacts are less likely to suffer cognitive decline.

The message from all this research: If friends are gifts we give ourselves, it's good to be generous.

Health-wise, friends encourage us to do what's good for us: eat better, drink less, exercise and seek medical care when we need it; friends listen to us when we need to let off steam and cheer us up when we're down. We stress less when we have friends who support us and help us along the way.

Frequently, family and friends are lumped together when people talk about support. However, friends don't usually make the same demands that family members sometimes do. The old saying goes, "We choose our friends, but we're stuck with our family." Granted, we may have a supportive family that we're very happy to be "stuck" with, but friendships allow us to experience ourselves in a new way and grow beyond the patterns and expectations of our family.

While friendships can be passing, we generally hang on to the ones that are meaningful. As we grow older, we may have fewer friends, but our pleasure in them grows. The reason: "People become more selective and

get better at knowing the kind of people they like and don't like," says Stanford psychology professor Laura Carstensen. "And they steer away from those they don't care for."

These days, in our mobile, fast-paced culture, it's more difficult to make and maintain social relationships than when folks stayed in one place and had more leisure time. People move across town or across country and jam-pack their lives with schedules that leave no time for finding and nurturing friendships. Consequently, at the end of a too-full day or when a free weekend finally arrives, we may discover ourselves longing for the kind of easy pleasure friendship offers. Without friends, life can get lonely.

If you've moved to a new location, or your friends have drifted away and you need to restock the reservoir, reach out through joining groups and pursuing hobbies and interests where you're likely to find kindred spirits. Extend a hand and an invitation.

Like any other living thing, friendship requires care and feeding:

- **Give your friendships priority**, not just when you're lonely.
- **Make a weekly date.** This can provide the scaffolding for an enduring emotional relationship.
- **Stay in touch** when you can't be together physically: call, write, and send pictures, too.
- **Celebrate occasions together.** Be there for the big events and the small. Create celebrations of your own.
- **Make time for old friends**, even if it might be an inconvenience.

There is wisdom in the simple lines from the childhood song, *Make new friends and keep the old. One is silver, the other gold.* *

10 Fears That Ruin Relationships

Loving someone is risky business, so it's natural that fear is present in relationships. But when fear operates in our life in a way that hurts us or hurts others—through aggression or withdrawal—it becomes a problem. Recognizing these fears and how they affect our life can help us make the necessary changes to get the love we want.

1. Fear of losing freedom. Tied down, trapped, cornered, stuck—this "claustrophobia" points to mistaken beliefs about what relationships are supposed to be.

2. Fear of conflict. Let's face it, love can be messy. But it doesn't have to be destructive. Constructive communication skills can be learned.

3. Fear of change. Change means work, discomfort, uncertainty. But oh, the rewards of growth and depth and renewal!

4. Fear of loss of control. We don't have to surrender personal power in a healthy relationship.

5. Fear of pain. Ultimately, we must decide whether we trust fear or trust love.

6. Fear of being "found out." When we hide our true self from those we love, we're usually afraid that our true self is unlovable.

7. Fear of losing self. Often this comes from watching others (parent, friend, relative) suppress their individuality in relationship.

8. Fear of not being enough. If we fear our own inadequacy, we often expect perfection in our partners.

9. Fear of rejection. To avoid being rejected, we may become pleasers, taking our authentic needs and desires out of the equation.

10. Fear of dependency. Some worry about losing the ability to take care of themselves, some about the responsibility for others. *

A Letter From Poonam Sharma, Ph.D.



I hope you enjoy this edition of *Healthful Changes*, a newsletter aimed at moving you toward greater emotional, psychological, and physical health. Let the words in this newsletter inspire you to embrace the personal power you have to make positive changes in your life.

As an experienced psychologist, I have personally worked with hundreds of individuals to get unstuck, gain clarity, and improve their personal lives. I provide counseling for adults seeking assistance with a variety of problems, such as depression, anxiety, or relationship difficulties.

I have a special interest and expertise in working with clients who are dealing with infertility, chronic illness, or injury.

My professional style is to listen carefully to understand your situation clearly, help you set realistic goals, and then support you in taking steps to achieve the results you desire. I see us as partners in the change process.

Please call me if you have questions, are ready to make an appointment, or would like a free 30-minute consultation.

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How Defensive Are You?



In her book, *Taking the War Out of Our Words: The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication*, Sharon Ellison estimates that we use 95% of our communications energy being defensive. Indeed, as soon as we feel any threat, either of not getting what we want or of being harmed or put down in some way, we are ready to protect ourselves by being defensive. Imagine how more enjoyable our communications could be if we learned how to respond nondefensively and how to avoid provoking defensiveness in others! Take this quiz to see how defensive you tend to be.

True False

- 1. When a police officer pulls me over, I've always got a "reason" ready for why I was speeding.
- 2. When people criticize or judge me, I am quick to point out their own faults.
- 3. I often think, "Can't others see that I'm not perfect?"
- 4. If people are upset or disappointed with me, I let them know why they are wrong with explanations and excuses.
- 5. I'm afraid that what others think of and say about me is true.
- 6. I'm always looking for the hidden critical message beneath people's requests.
- 7. If I don't defend myself, I'll just get run over.
- 8. If I'm open to people's criticisms and judgments of me, it means I'm weak.
- 9. I can never admit that I'm wrong.
- 10. I may not defend myself verbally to someone, but I'll be sure to get that person back somehow.
- 11. If I'm at fault for something, it's always because of some factor outside of myself over which I had no control.

If you responded true more often than false to the above questions, consider some of the following alternatives to defensiveness.

- 1. I'm always looking to improve myself, so I welcome feedback from others on how well I am doing (or not).
- 2. I sit with someone's criticism of me to see if there is a kernel of truth in it. If there is, I acknowledge it and work to improve in that area.
- 3. I realize that sometimes people's criticisms about me are all about the "story" they have made up around a situation. I don't take it personally, and I don't take it on as my responsibility.
- 4. I know that I can actually have greater influence in a situation by acknowledging that I may be wrong.
- 5. When someone uses the words "always" and "never" I ignore those words and focus instead on the rest of the message.
- 6. I take responsibility for what I can change.
- 7. I listen for the (usually) hidden need expressed in a person's complaint or anger, acknowledge the need, and then see whether there is something I can do to meet it. *

Got a Hunch? Trust It.

Ever get the sense you're in danger for no apparent reason? Or feel like something good is coming your way? Or know who's calling before you even answer the phone? That's your intuition speaking to you and it makes good sense to listen.

Just like bats have built-in sonar that guides them in the dark, we humans have an internal guidance system that gives us information beyond the limits of our other five senses. Intuition, our so-called sixth sense, is something we're all born with and, like breathing, it's operational all the time.

Intuition doesn't talk to us the way our other senses do. Its voice is fragmented, symbolic and often sudden. We get an urge to call someone immediately, a certain song comes to us out of the blue, a particular object or image appears again and again.

Call these messages hunches, gut feelings, inklings or just "something in my bones," intuition is that still, small voice inside that looks out for our well-being. And, according to intuition experts, our sixth sense is sending us "hits" all the time. They are answers or options to questions we may not even know we have asked.

"Intuition is an internal guidance system we're all born with," says Nancy Rosanoff, author of *Intuition Workout: A Practical Guide to Discovering and Developing Your Inner Knowing*. "It just needs to be brought out so you can use it to your advantage."

Like strengthening your physical body by exercising, you can develop your intuitive skills to better serve you in many areas of your life.

In relationships, your higher consciousness can steer you toward healthy unions or away from painful ones. And while intuition is no substitute for research, planning and common sense, it can be a useful additional tool in financial decision-making. In health, holistic therapies, including intuitive healing,

are becoming an adjunct to mainstream medicine. "Nothing is more exciting than learning to trust what your body is trying to tell you and then acting on this knowledge," says Christiane Northrup, M.D.

Here are a few tips to help strengthen your intuitive skills.

Clear your mind. Relax and unclutter your brain.

Know the question. Focus the question, and understand what you're asking. Not, "Will I get a new job?" but, "What will my new job be like?" Look for impressions, feelings and physical reactions, not specific "yes" or "no" answers.

Pay attention to details. Read between the lines. You can prime your perception skills by monitoring how people interact with you.

Map your messages. Take notes on hunches, inklings and gut feelings then track events and situations to get an ear for the sound of your intuitive voice. Also, piecing together random bits of inner information might give you insight into a bigger picture.

Don't judge. Listen to your inner voice and accept what comes without judgment. Don't let your logical mind interfere with your intuitive mind.

Notice symbols and other nonlinear clues. You may have to translate or decode recurring images and pictures that are unique to your intuitive alphabet.

Expect mistakes. Not in the intuitive process, but in your interpretation. Remember with practice, you'll improve.

With practice, you will be able to use your intuition, not as a replacement for, but as an enhancement to your own good judgment. Listen to and learn from your intuition. It can show you how to be more discerning and compassionate, how to trust yourself to make decisions that are true to you, and, ultimately, instill a deeply felt belief in yourself and your dreams. *



Dreams — Messengers in the Night

Like our heartbeat and our breathing, our intuition continues to operate even while we sleep, speaking to us in the language of the night: Dreams. Using a few simple techniques, you can make the most of these intuitive nocturnal messages.

- Before you go to sleep, remind yourself of your intention to remember your dreams.
- When you awaken from a dream, lie still and go over your dream. Translate the pictures and images into words before you open your eyes.
- Make notes. Keep pen and paper close by so that

you can record these messages. You may think you'll remember your dreams, but like morning mist, they disappear with the light of day.

- If you want your sleeping mind to work on a particular issue, ask for a specific dream. Before you drift off, focus on the topic you want information about.
- Keep a dream journal in which you write not only the dreams, but also recurring symbols and images. Though there are a number of dream interpretation books available and some images are generally thought to be universal, like your fingerprint, your dream language is uniquely your own. *

Learning to Pay Attention to "Red Flags"

Susan's partner is everything she's ever wanted in a relationship. He's funny, warm, a good listener and he puts her first. Sure, he also has a problem with his temper—but nobody's perfect, right? At least he's taking his anger out on the furniture and not on her, she reassures herself.

Tom has had a rough year. His mother died, leaving him with the care of his elderly father. He was promoted at his company, but the price tag was high: more stress with not much more pay. His teenage daughter has been angry and sullen, often coming home late at night. Tom thinks he can handle it all, but he's not sleeping well, and every so often, he finds himself shaking for no reason.

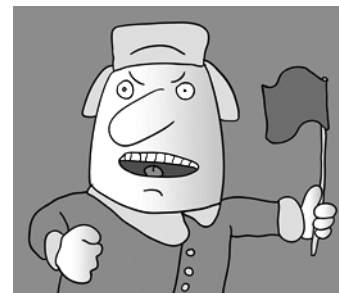
Red flags are waved in front of bulls to get their attention. We humans are equipped with our own red flags—and it's up to us to pay attention. Unfortunately, too often we ignore these early warning signs that something is wrong, and by the time we sit up and take notice, the problems have multiplied.

We've all experienced these

warning signs that something's not right in our lives. These are emergency "flares" set off by something deep and rich found in all of us—our intuition. If we learn to pay attention to this inner wisdom, we can gain extraordinary guidance, especially when it comes to our relationships.

"No matter how many facts we gather, if we cling to logic, we're using only a small percentage of our capacity to know," writes Penney Peirce in her book, *The Intuitive Way: The Definitive Guide to Increasing Your Awareness*. "Intuition, I'm convinced, is where the other 90 percent of our brainpower lies. Through intuition we get the big picture."

Most relationships—especially romantic ones—exist in a world of overpowering emotions and hidden expectations, many of them mysterious and unconscious. We want something so badly, we don't listen to our inner voice that tells us something is wrong. As well, we live in a culture that rewards facts and proof, and downplays what we cannot see or touch. But, like love



and faith, our intuition is something we all possess and can learn to use to make our lives richer and more satisfying.

"Intuition isn't mystical. It's a sort of background sense of how things should work," writes bestselling author Laura Day, who calls herself an "intuitive." In her books, *Practical Intuition* and *Dynamic Intuition: Creating a Joyous and Successful Life*, Day offers guidelines on ways to access this important faculty.

In the cases above, if Susan and Tom were listening to their intuition's red flags—rather than their fears—they would move quickly to deal with their problems before they got out of control. Like them, we can also tap into our intuition to help guide us in making healthy and effective decisions in relationships and life. *

Please visit
www.FertilityCounseling.com
for a FREE audio download
of Dr. Sharma's presentation,
"Ten Tips for Surviving Infertility."

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