

5 Signs of a Strong Friendship

“Rosilind, what do you think is the reason that you continue to date men who are not healthy for you?”

The question caught me off guard.

Having just come out of a relationship where I had been emotionally and psychologically abused, I was told over and over again that I wasn't to blame, that what had happened to me said more about my ex-fiance than it did about me.

And this was true. Very true.

A victim of abuse is never the guilty party. However, in my case I had slowly and systematically walked from the frying pan into the fire. With each boyfriend the poison was worse.

This time it was almost deadly.

“I don't know.” I said. *“But I want to embark on a journey to find that answer.”*

And that is exactly what I did.

I put a moratorium on dating for an indefinite period of time, until I was certain that I had discovered the answer.

While I learned much about myself during the next five years, it would take much longer to become healthy inside. Five years later I began dating my husband, who has been essential in teaching me how to become a healthy friend and recognize healthy friendships.

5 Character Traits of a Healthy Friend

1. A healthy friend is forgiving. One of my biggest hangups has always been forgiveness. I am a “stuffer” and my biggest

battle to become healthy was learning to embrace God's grace so that I could release it to those who had offended me. The worst part was that I didn't even know that I was harboring bitterness. But I was, and I used past hurts to trap me into a victim mentality. My default was self-pity.

Once I began walking in forgiveness and renewal of my mind, so that I no longer identified with my pain but with Jesus Christ; and once I began to change my default from self-pity to gratefulness, I began living in a whole new level of freedom and joy!

Most of all, I learned to understand grace in a whole new way! I had become a great receptor of grace ... and a generous giver of grace!

2. A healthy friend is authentic. Authenticity is probably the No. 1 character trait I admire most in people. A person who is comfortable with their own idiosyncrasies, limitations and imperfections is a person who is free to be authentic. They realize that to err is human, and that a mistake is only a cue to try again from a different angle.

But more than that, an authentic friend is a trustworthy friend. With an authentic friend there are no unwritten rules. You will not discover that this friend has harbored poor opinions of you or talked about you behind your back because they speak truth ... and always in love.

3. A healthy friend is real. A healthy friend owns up to his faults and blind spots and asks for prayer. They have learned the value of humility and do not assume that they are above being needy from time to time.

A healthy friend has learned that we are all equal under grace: whether we've been saved 30 years or 3 years, we were all equally lost and we are equally forgiven. In inner-circle relationships there should be a healthy exchange of needs, prayer and openness.

4. A healthy friend respects boundaries. Every person has boundaries. Some prefer wider boundaries while others are more comfortable with narrower ones. A healthy friend will recognize and respect those boundaries without feeling insecure or growing pushy.

A healthy friend has learned to surrender expectations in the friendship. Realizing that each party has their own responsibilities and obligations, they release expectations and comparisons to other friendships.

5. A healthy friend communicates. One of my blind spots (to which I am no longer blind) was to martyrdom. I would silently put up with a lot of stuff that I didn't like, until I could bear it no more and then explode on anything and anyone within any reasonable distance.

This is obviously very unhealthy!

My husband, early on in our dating relationship, taught me to immediately share what was bothering me, rather than subjecting him to an indefinitely "silent treatment." Silent treatments are unfair and cause insecurity to build in the relationship. A healthy friend will immediately communicate their dislike of a situation or comment, or their need for understanding in a certain matter.

Without healthy communication a relationship is stunted because it can only be as healthy as the amount of communication that takes place.

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