

5 Ways to Build Meaningful Male Friendships

James has a lot of friends, but he needs more actual male friendship.

He's one of those guys people refer to as a man's man: athletic; Navy pilot; good-looking; rugged; smart; outdoorsman. Guys want James on the softball team. He's the go-to dad for campfire stories at Scouts. He's always surrounded by men when he fires up his grill or opens the cooler on his deck.

But James put a different spin on things when he showed up at a training event for potential small group leaders at his church. "I want to learn how to build intentional community with other dads my age," he said. "Because guys don't know how to be friends."

James understands that backslapping, sports stories, work anecdotes and fist bumps often mask a crying need for deeper relationships where trust is built, fear is unmasked, and men learn how to invest in one another. The ideal of the "strong, silent, self-sufficient" man is a broken, dysfunctional, failed idea.

To the extent that we put it to rest, we will be better equipped as dads, as husbands, as grandparents and as friends. Bottom line: We need other men who know us and love us anyway.

Here are five ways to build meaningful male friendships:

1. Join a guys group. Many faith communities offer small groups where 5-10 men find a safe, confidential place where they can be honest, let their guard down, ask hard questions, share stories, receive encouragement and get to know one

another.

2. Get involved in volunteer work. Doing something positive with other guys often leads to real friendships. Scouting, coaching, food banks. Anywhere where serving others is the common ground. When the focus turns away from small talk, posturing and sports stories around the cooler, real friendships can break out.

3. Look for a mentor. If you're part of a larger organization such as a church or synagogue or even a corporation, step out of your comfort zone and ask a man you look up to for help or advice. Meet over breakfast or lunch. Tell them you want to pick their brain about parenting, work, faith or marriage. Be open to a relationship where they become your mentor.

4. Look for a mentee. Likewise, put yourself in the position of helping a younger or less-experienced man along. In the language of faith, it's the principle that in order to be a disciple, you should also disciple someone yourself. Be a mentor and a mentee. Invest yourself in other guys.

5. Be intentional. Don't wait for friendships to appear out of thin air. We were designed to experience community, to learn from one another, and to encourage other men. Decide that you will either eat lunch or share coffee with at least one male friend one day every week, if not more. Then follow through, even if you don't really want to!

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