



Finding Your Mom Posse

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Sunday was National Friendship Day and it had me thinking about all the great friends I've made over the years. I'm lucky to have friends that I've known for a good part of my life. We share our joys and accomplishments and rely on each other for support when times are bad. Then I started thinking about friends I've lost contact with and about conversations I've had with friends, with patients, and with their parents about the difficulty of making friends. For kids, we often talk about things like how to make friends even when feeling shy or self-conscious, what it will be like making friends at a new school, or how to deal with bullies. But I often spend time talking with their parents about how difficult it is to make friends as an adult.

As adults, we've already made our friends, whether they're friends from childhood, college, work, etc. and we don't often think about making new friends. But what happens when we lose touch with people or when life takes us in a direction that makes it more difficult to spend time with our old friends? As a parent, you're juggling so many things (kids, work, home life) that friendships often get put on the back burner because you just can't find the time to tend to them.

So over time, you may lose that connection. Also, as you and your friends have different life experiences, you might have less in common over time. It can become easy to tell yourself that you don't really need friends- you have your spouse/partner or you're busy with your kids and with work. You may tell yourself that your friends will be there when you resurface. But, what if they're not? We've all had people that we've lost touch with over time, whether it's because they stopped calling or because we did. And while we might miss the friendship that we had, we tell ourselves that it's okay because _____ (fill in the blank with whatever rationale you've used). While losing friendships does happen for most people, I have news- friendships are critical. In fact, a growing body of research over the last decade has shown evidence that a lack of adult friendships and the social connection and support they provide poses a variety of mental and physical health risks. It's not just about quantity- quality matters, and meaningful

connections that prevent you from feeling isolated are key. That's right- not having meaningful, fulfilling friendships can kill you, or at least make you ill. Notice that I did not say anything about having a meaningful, fulfilling *romantic* relationship- I'm talking about platonic *friendships*.

It's not that diamonds are a girl's best friend.

It's your best friends that are your diamonds.

- Gina Barreca

Friendships are important whether you are married or not, which brings me to another important point- your spouse/partner can't be your only friend. The necessity of friendships has been found regardless of marital status or even other health issues/behaviors, like obesity or cigarette smoking. Part of that is because it's impossible for one person to provide all your connection and social support needs. Also, a romantic relationship has its ups and downs and there may be times when you need a break from each other. Asking your partner to be your sole social outlet on top of everything else that's required in a romantic relationship is unfair to both of you. Also, after all of this extended togetherness, you'd probably like to see some other faces besides the ones living in your home.

If your next thought is, "But my kids provide me with so much fulfillment," that's great, but they're not your friends and they can't provide you with the social support and connection you get from an *adult* friend. Yes, it's important for you to be there for your kids and to have an emotional connection to them. It's also important for them to have a mom who is present and modeling having a fulfilling life. So, while they're interacting with their friends, it might be a good time for you to connect with some of yours.



Now that you're on board with making some new friends or reconnecting with old friends, you might be asking, "So, how do I do it?" I'm glad you asked. If you have friends you haven't spoken to in a while, reach out to them. Let them know you've been thinking about them and that you want to reconnect. You may not be able to meet in person, but you can make a phone call or set up a time to video chat. If you're really pressed for time, sending a text or email to a good friend or catching up via social media can work in a pinch. *How* you reconnect doesn't matter as long as you are making a genuine connection that helps you and your friend feel less isolated. So, right now, put a reminder in your phone to reach out to a friend. I bet you're already thinking of someone. It'll only take a minute. Go ahead, I'll wait.



What if you don't have friends to reconnect with? How do you make new friends? Think about what you would tell your kids- the first step is to put yourself out there. You have to be open to meeting new people in order for this to work. You're going to put yourself in some situations where you have a great time and meet some great people and other situations where you're bored out of your mind and meet some not-so-great people. But, if you remain open to meeting people and trying some things outside of your day-to-day routine, you'll be surprised by the new friends you'll find.

Second, be realistic. If you like having a bunch of friends, that's great. If you prefer to have one or two close friends, that's also great. The goal here is not to go out and make superficial friendships that don't actually mean anything to you. The goal is to make friendships with people you genuinely like and trust and who help you feel a sense of community.



So, let's get to the good stuff. Practically speaking, where do you go to make friends, especially when—from a global health perspective—it's not a great time to be around a bunch of people you don't know? Fortunately, we live in a world where it's easy to connect virtually. Normally, I'd suggest that you do things like go to places you like and engage in activities that you enjoy where there might be other people. For instance, take a class or go to a park you like on a frequent basis. The key would be to do things you enjoy so that you increase your likelihood of meeting people with similar interests and to do it enough so that people can get to know you. For instance, if you like drawing, taking an art class would be a great idea- you'll automatically be around people who have some degree of interest in art and you'll see each other often enough that it increases the chances that you'll find things that you like about each other. If you're feeling really daring, invite someone from class to have coffee or to hang out outside of class. Now, again, this might not be something you feel safe doing right now given COVID-19. That's okay. Can you take an *online* class where you get to interact with the other students? The medium is different, but the principle is the same. Instead of meeting for coffee, you can set up a virtual chat or you can work on a class assignment "together" via video chat.

If the activities you like tend to be more solo in nature, you'll have to find other ways to connect. You could join a group that centers around a particular interest- if you make crafts, you can join a group where you share your projects. Or, if you're a foodie, join a group where you swap recipes or talk about your favorite restaurants. If you're looking for support around the issues you face as a mom, there are a ton of moms' groups out there. Usually, you can find



a group in your local area. There are a number of Facebook groups that cater to various interests. The best part is, if you can't find a group you want to join, you can start your own.

Many people are hesitant to put themselves out there to find a whole new group. If that's you, you're not alone. Joining a group that focuses on your profession is a great way to make contacts and meet potential new friends. The added benefit is that you can connect with people who you don't work with, so direct competition is minimal and developing a friendship can be a little easier. Another option is to look to the parents of your kids' friends and classmates. When your kid has a playdate or participates in an activity, take some time to get to know the other parents. You have a number of easy conversation starters- your kids, the activity, parenting, etc. Over time, you'll get to know the other parents better and you might find some good friends in the group.

If this all sounds similar to advice given to people who are looking for a romantic partner, you're not wrong. Finding a date and finding a friend are remarkable similar- you need to put yourself in the right situations to meet the people you're most likely to connect with. In fact, there are even some dating-style apps that help you connect with platonic friends based on similar interests.

To help you out, one of amazing interns, Madeline, came up with a list of ideas of places you can go, mostly online, to meet people and make some friends. To help you have a little fun with this, you can download our handy worksheet to help you create your "Find a Friend Profile."

Here's the list:

1. Friend-finding Apps:

- a. Bumble BFF – Yes, this was originally a dating app. But they have an option that allows you to seek out friends. You can turn off the dating option, so everyone you see will also just be looking to make friends.

- b. Hey! Vina – This is like Tinder, but for friends. Create a profile and start looking for your new friends based on similar interests. You even get to take quizzes to help you find better matches! (I’m a sucker for a good quiz.)
 - c. MeetMe and We3 – These apps are similar to one another in that they help you connect with people who live nearby who have similar interests.
2. Great websites to increase social interaction:
- a. Meetup – Find activities happening in your local area based on particular interests or careers. Join one group or several and attend any activities that strike your fancy. Many groups may be organizing virtual events if you’re not ready to start going out.
 - b. Facebook – As mentioned above, there are numerous Facebook groups organized around various interests. You can join a group led by someone you follow on Facebook or you can search for an interest-specific group. You can also start your own group and invite some of your Facebook friends to join and spread the word.
3. Volunteering: In a previous post, Paying it Forward, Sarah talked about doing our part by volunteering. Take a look at that post and the accompanying list of volunteer opportunities for ideas. Many organizations have options for volunteering online. You can connect with other volunteers to work on a project. Here are just a few additional ideas of searchable databases:
- a. Create the Good
 - b. Idealist
 - c. Volunteer Match

*For a good summary of research on adult friendships, see the following:

Friends Wanted, APA (2014): <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/01/cover-friends>

The Importance of Adult Friendships, AARP (2019):

https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/life-leisure/2020/importance-of-adult-friendships.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00314.001.pdf