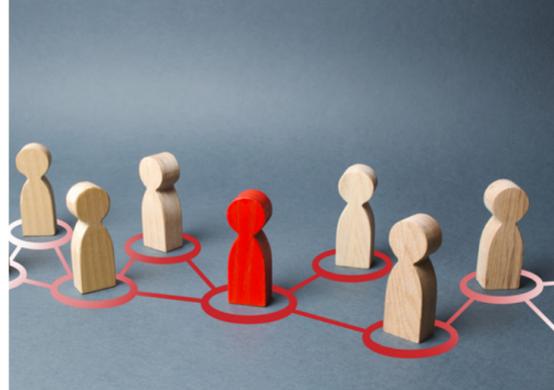


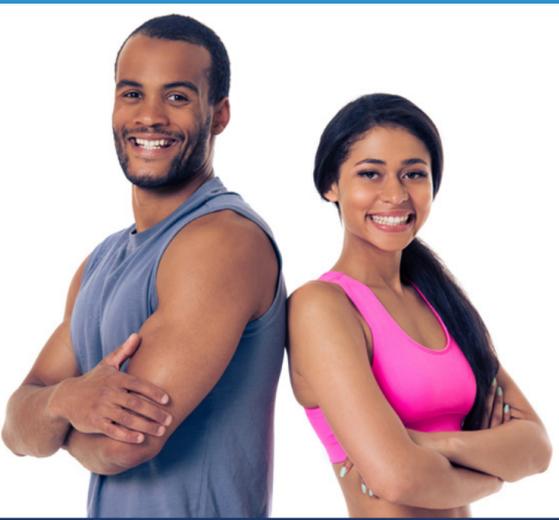


WHAT COVID-19 HAS TAUGHT US ABOUT HUMAN CONNECTION

One thing we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic experience is that we are not happy when we are separated from others – loved ones, colleagues and even people we do not know. We like to go to restaurants, coffee shops and just hang around people. Not only do we like it, but the pandemic has also highlighted how we need connection for our mental and emotional wellbeing. Sometimes it seems that it is only when things are taken away, that we learn to appreciate their value and importance. Now, with the COVID-19 restrictions gradually being lifted, we can be more aware of caring for our connections with this deeper understanding.



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE EQUIVALENT TO A HEALTHY LIFE



Have you ever noticed that the more you spend time with someone, the more you like them? This is called the exposure effect. Being repeatedly exposed to someone with whom you share common interest means you are more likely to like them and become friends. So, if you want to forge new relationships you will have to show up, consistently. Check in with your colleagues, even when there is not a specific work issue to discuss. Visit your friends regularly or arrange meet-ups. Arrange to meet outdoors as a COVID-19 precaution. Use social media to sustain your relationships too. Connect with your friends by text, commenting on and liking their social media posts, and even better – with video and phone calls.

HOW CAN I MAKE AND KEEP FRIENDSHIPS?

BE APPROACHABLE

Smiling and being nice may sound superficial, but it has a large impact on how likely people are to want to befriend you. Smiling plays a big role. Studies show that the number of times you smile during a conversation has a direct effect on how friendly you appear to others. So, if you are meeting on Zoom or on a WhatsApp video call, turn on your camera and look into the lens so the person can see your eyes connecting with them. The time of hiding with cameras off is over – it is no good for your mental and emotional health.



BE A GOOD LISTENER

Listening to someone shows that you care and support them. When you spend time with a loved one, give them your undivided attention. When chatting online, keep your eyes on the screen. When physically present with them, turn your phone to silent and give your undivided attention.



GIVE THEM SPACE WHEN NEEDED

Everyone needs space to either be alone or spend time with other people. Clinging to them could push them away.



BE THE FRIEND YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE

Treat your relationships the same way you would like to be treated. Try your best to be thoughtful, kind, trustworthy and reliable.



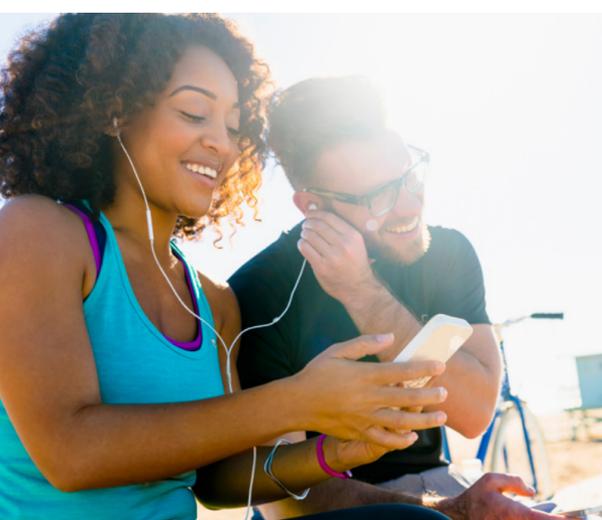
DO NOT PRESSURE THEM WITH EXPECTATIONS AND RULES

The best relationships often develop naturally, with time. Do not put pressure on them to spend all their spare time with you or to get comfortable quickly. Allow the friendship to grow stronger with time.



MAKE TIME

Spending time with friends often means that you will bond more, so schedule regular hangouts that suit everyone. For example, go on an outing once a month or grab a quick coffee together before or after work. Setting the next date after a get-together is a good way to ensure you will see each other regularly.



We all need friendships, love and connection to flourish so reach out, be kind, show appreciation and gratitude. It is amazing how the more you give, it somehow comes back in unexpected ways.

References

1. Hello Doctor. 22 November 2019. Learn how to make and keep friends. Website. <http://www.hellodoctor.co.za/learn-how-to-make-and-keep-friends/>.
2. Hello Doctor. 3 May 2019. Here's how to make friends as an introvert. Website. <https://www.hellodoctor.co.za/heres-how-to-make-friends-as-an-introvert/>.

- ▶ Health department toll free: **0800 111 011**
- ▶ Send a USSD to: ***134*664*38#**
- ▶ Email: **wced@mhg.co.za**

Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves

