

Friends

For many of us who didn't have a great childhood, our relationship to friends is very special, and central to our lives. Friends are our chosen family.

We have old friends – you can find yourself in the eyes of someone who has been looking at you for many years... We have daily friends – we are the ones others ask about that person's day to day life (like, "It's Tuesday, okay... and it's 4:30; let's see, Mike should be getting off work right now but I think he's got a dentist appointment today..."). And we have really close friends – you can tell that person, and even more, show that person anything at all, from deep inside your heart, even when you're not proud of it. And how blessed we are when those three characteristics are in the same friend!

Friends are our support and our community. Those two words get used a lot, but it's really what friends are. They are people who know – and who get – what's going on with you. They are our actual supports, with the concrete stuff of life – we share food and childcare and whatever resources we have. This is tremendous, to feel held by your surroundings – by your friends.

Sometimes, though, friends – old ones, daily ones, close ones – are attached to the way we are. They have a lot invested in us doing the same things, or being the same way we have been, for a long time. Again, this familiarity can be comforting.

But when we want to change our lives (find new attitudes, roles, behaviours; or start new jobs, education, therapy), sometimes these connections get messy or painful. The weight of the past can pull us down. Friends might feel betrayed when we change or when we reorganize our activities.

Friends may also sometimes undermine the belief that we *can* change. By saying and doing things that at first might appear supportive, they can actually sabotage our efforts at making changes in our lives. For example, a friend may tell you "Oh no no, you don't need to get a job; I'll take care of you..." Or she might casually hand you a beer at a party even though she knows you have resolved to quit drinking. Or for the one trying to get healthy and eat better, a friend might come over with a movie and lots of junk food, because that's just what you guys have always done together.

Things can also get complicated when we decide to tell people about violence that happened to us in the past or is happening now. Friends may have a hard time with it and get freaked out, or it might bother them because they have their own pain and secrets about violence that they aren't yet ready to deal with. All you can do is explain to them what's going on as best you can, and see if they can come down this new path with you. You might find you need to support them a bit if they have their own stuff about violence in their lives - but only as far and as much as is healthy for you at that time.

But ultimately you might have to just let them go for now. You'll see them again – we come together for deep and beautiful reasons and they may come back around. Real friendships have a way of going in cycles. Nothing is ever really lost. Maybe you'll see them again in the next lifetime!