

If friends aren't the people we play with at recess or live down the hall from in the college dorm, what are they? Why do we need them if not to have a friend for hide and seek or someone to share the highs and lows of growing up with? Why do we even need friends at all?

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I had an interesting conversation about friendship years ago. We had just moved to a new duty station and I was concerned that my husband wasn't putting in any effort to find new friends. He looked at me, confused, "I already have friends."

"But you don't have friends, *here*." He was someone who only needed a few close friendships. Which, fair - who has the bandwidth to keep in touch with a large group of people?

I had been keeping my eyes open, hoping to find at least one person to claim as a friend, to help in the adjustment process of living in a new place without feeling completely alone. And he didn't seem to think there was any value in it. I know many people who would agree with him.

He did end up developing a few, very close friendships during our time there. When he was sick, even days before he died, those were the friends who sat with him in the hospital (one even told us he was coming once he got to the airport so we couldn't tell him not to come - good friends know how to anticipate

stubbornness). Those are the friends who have continued to be my good friends even all these years after he died.

I've seen it time and time again - we think we don't need the support of a community. We enjoy having people to do fun stuff with for sure, but it seems like too much effort and risk to build intimate and trustworthy relationships with people. Making friends is hard work. It really is. But as someone who has lived through more than her fair share (whatever that means) of loss and trauma, I want to challenge the idea that having close friends is simply a gift, not a necessity.

Hard seasons of life will come. You will need people to lean on.

And it's not just single people. You can't assume your spouse won't also need people to lean on. My husband couldn't use me as his only emotional support through the end of his life because I couldn't carry that and also process my own experience of being his caregiver, knowing I was about to be widowed while pregnant. We both needed others to lean on.

Friendships are for fun. And friendships are for support. And there's no one-size-fits-all friend. No single person can meet all of your needs - it doesn't matter if it's a spouse, parent, child, friend, or other relationship - we all have limits.

I'm just saying: consider what you need when life feels easy and when life is hard. How do the people around you fit into that? And what can you offer them when their lives are hard? Community, the people who are mutually committed to going through life together, is an important, even essential, part of having your human needs met.

Your nerdy thought for the day: in any Psychology 101, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is covered in some depth. There's some discussion on the accuracy of the model, but for this conversation, I think its simplicity is helpful. Imagine a pyramid - you can't build the peak until you've built the layer below it. And you can't build that layer til you've built the layer below that. You have to start at the ground and build upwards. It's the same with our needs as humans.

Before anything, we need our physiological needs met (air, food, water, shelter, sleep, etc). Once those needs are met, we can meet our safety needs (a job, maintaining health, feeling physically safe, among others). We generally cannot expect to find and keep a job or stay healthy if we do not have those most basic, physiological needs met.

Our need for love and belonging (friendship, family, and other ways of belonging) can be met when our physiological and safety needs are met, followed by needs related to esteem and self-actualization.

If you're someone that doubts the need for intimate, trustworthy friendships, consider this: our need for love and belonging isn't like an expansion pack to human needs - a nifty perk, if you will. It's not even the peak of the pyramid. We need to experience love and belonging so deeply that it is the first thing we seek once our physical and safety needs are met. How would your perspective on the need for building a community of people in your life change if you thought of community as the third item on a list of "how to survive being human?"

We need our friends to get through the hardest times. And friends are those people we have fun and explore life with. And our friends are the people who help us to become exactly who we were meant to be by providing a supportive layer to our ability to experience things like respect, self-esteem, strength, and freedom.

Here are a few books to learn more about the importance of community:

- Thank You, Omu! by Oge Mora
- How We Show Up by Mia Birdsong
- The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker

You'll find links to these along with a full transcript of this episode at BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/75

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If you found this episode encouraging or helpful, share it with a friend and remember: You deserve to have friends who will celebrate with you when things are exciting and give you a safe place to collapse when life gets hard. Good friends are worth the work to find them. You're doing great.