

BESSER ZUSAMMEN Freude in Gesellschaft

INITIATIVE



Friendship course Adults

Status V0.2

This leaflet is the base for a friendship course for adults with six sessions.

Feel free to make use of it in your community, religious community or social institution. It is best employed in a group setting where the table sizes are about six people, leading to varying groups of three at a table for smaller discussions and potential joining of the groups.

Introduction

The key to finding one's path out of loneliness is forming friendships. While some of this depends on luck, much of it relies on developing good habits and the right mindset. In recent years, numerous books on friendship have been published, covering the topic extensively.

I, too, have written a rather comprehensive volume to structure this material. However, it is primarily intended for those who have the time to delve deeply into the subject. This leaflet, by contrast, is designed to provide a structured framework for six interactive discussion sessions, helping participants initiate and develop friendships.

While the initial draft of this course was more prescriptive and instructional, a more exploratory and flexible approach may be better suited. Facilitators can adjust the pacing and depth of discussions as needed, expanding on topics according to the group's needs.

The background theory and content are derived from the book Practical Friendship, which is available in PDF format. Additionally, a curated list of books on loneliness, social connection, and friendship can be found at www.initiative-gemeinsamkeit.de. If hosting this course, it might be beneficial to have some of these books available for casual browsing.

Good luck with the course! We would love to hear about your experience and how it worked for you.

Christian Langkamp

Initiative GemEinsamkeit

For feedback please feel free to reach me at hallo@initiative-gemeinsamkeit.de

Course design

Whilst the material can be read and thought about by a singular person to think about their individual experience of loneliness and friendships, it is designed as a structured course for small groups. The course is intended to be facilitated by a supervisor or course conductor, who provides brief introductory presentations at the beginning of each session to introduce key topics and spark discussion.

The course consists of six core topics, but its format is flexible rather than rigid. While the initial design follows a structured sequence, facilitators can adjust and expand sessions based on the needs of the participants. If time and resources allow, the course can be extended to eight or ten sessions. We plan to expand the material in the future to give course leaders greater flexibility in selecting modules and tailoring content based on participant needs and budget constraints.

As such there are six modules / evenings

1. Social connection and loneliness
2. Why starting out feels hard - and how to overcome it
3. Becoming the kind of person others would like to befriend
4. Deepening friendships through meaningful interactions
5. Keeping friendships alive and resilient
6. Creating lasting social belonging

Optional Sessions:

7. Discussing religion, politics or values without moralising, judging and fighting

Final Wrap-Up Session: A social event to reflect on lessons learned, encourage ongoing connection, and possibly invite a friend or acquaintance—potentially forming the next course group.

All sessions are calibrated for 1h 30min, but it probably will be best to allow for 2h time in order not to have to rush discussions or exercises.

Session 1: Effects of Loneliness on Mental health

We are all here because we feel a sense of urgency or a need to improve our social connections. This, in itself, is the very definition of loneliness—and, to some extent, it can be a good thing.

Just as hunger is a signal—sometimes painful—that alerts our body to a lack of energy and motivates us to seek food, loneliness is a signal prompting us to address the state of our social connections.

At its core, loneliness is the realization that the quality or quantity of our social relationships falls short of what we desire or expect. However, when loneliness becomes chronic, it can have serious effects on both physical and mental health, making it essential to prevent or repair.

The best way to address loneliness is by fostering strong, meaningful social connections—whether through family, friends, or community engagement.

Discussion:

What are some moments when you have felt truly connected—when you were not lonely? Who were you with, and what kind of connections did you share?

What made those connections meaningful, and how did they make you feel? What specific experiences contributed to that sense of connection?

Share your experiences:

Reflect on a time when you felt a deep sense of belonging.

What elements of that interaction made it special?

How did it positively impact your mood, energy, or sense of self?

Session 1: Effects of Loneliness on Mental health

Exercise: Caring and Knowing: Four questions determine your closeness

1. Do they know you well?
2. Do you know them well?
3. Do they care about you?
4. Do you care about them?

Know you	You know
Care about you	You care about them
Peter	
1	2
0	1

We use a scale of -2 to 2.

Thus in this example Peter knows you somewhat, and you know him very well, Peter does not particular care about you and you care somewhat about him.

Alternatively you can use abbreviations as coding

Not at all - not very - a bit - (knows) well/ (cares) some - (knows) very well, (cares) a lot

<u>1</u>	

<u>2</u>	

<u>3</u>	

<u>4</u>	

<u>5</u>	

<u>6</u>	

<u>7</u>	

<u>8</u>	

<u>9</u>	

Discussion: How did this listing exercise feel ?

What is difficult ?

You might have overly rosy expectations and expect too much from others. On the other hand, you might be too pessimistic, discounting positive memories and signals of affection, or underestimating how much people like you.

One piece of advice: do not compare your results with others, feel pressured by peers, or judge yourself too harshly. This exercise is highly subjective, and the only real guideline is your own gut feeling.

Session 1: Effects of Loneliness on Mental health

Homework: Connection Journal

If you think about the people on your list, who would you like to strengthen your connection with? What is one small action you could take this week—sending a message, suggesting a meet-up, or simply checking in?

Date	Who did I connect with	What did we do / talk about	How did it feel? (1-5 scale)	Do I want to follow up? When ?

If you think about them, also consider how much time you have spent with them, in what context, and in what way.

There is a concept called "dirt time," inspired by children playing together in the sand or mud, simply enjoying the moment. It refers to time spent together in a relaxed and unstructured way, where connection builds naturally over time.

Friendships are not instant; they require repeated, positive, and consistent interactions to develop into deep connections. Research suggests that at least 50 hours of intentional time together are needed to form a meaningful friendship.

Who on your list would you like to go on this journey with

Homework 2: Reciprocity I

Do you notice any clear mismatches between caring and knowing in the connections you listed? If the other person feels more distant, how does that affect you? Do you feel rejected, accepting, or patient? If you are the one keeping some distance and holding the other person at arm's length, how does that make you feel?

Session 2: Taking the first step: Why starting out feels hard and how to overcome it

Overcoming the difficulties of initiating friendships

When we meet up with an old friend, our decision is based on the foundation of an existing social connection—the memory of shared laughter, fun experiences, moments of care, and affection. All of this leads us to anticipate that our next get-together will likely be enjoyable.

With a new person, however—setting aside curiosity and novelty—none of that foundation exists. The risks are higher: they may feel less affection toward us, our jokes might not land the same way since we lack a shared context, or we may struggle to find common ground for conversation. This is completely natural, which is why managing our expectations is key.

At the same time, meeting someone new comes with a higher risk of rejection and uncertainty—unsure patterns, unfamiliar dynamics, or even questions about where to go out. And yet... pushing through this discomfort is the only way to move forward. There cannot be a second, third, or fourth meeting without the first.

The key, then, is to look for potential—commonalities to build on, traits that encourage friendship, interesting aspects of their lives, or anything that makes you think, I do or might enjoy this person's company, and they might enjoy mine.

Exercise 2-1 : Self introduction

(Note – it is unclear how much time should be allocated—2 minutes, 5 minutes per introduction, possibly 5 minutes each with another 5 for follow-up.)

Practice introductions—do two (or three) rounds where you introduce yourself to someone, and they introduce themselves to you.

Look for strengths or interesting traits in the other person. Why might it be enjoyable or valuable to spend time with them in the future? What kind of activity could you both enjoy together?

Also, consider how attentively they listen to you—do they seem genuinely interested in what you say? At the same time, observe your own engagement while they speak. Do you stay focused, or do certain triggers make you lose interest?

Optional: After the exercise, briefly share with the other person what you found most memorable or encouraging about them.

Optional with more time: Have other participants observe the self-introductions and provide feedback.

Session 2: Taking the first step: Why starting out feels hard and how to overcome it

Discussion 2 - 2 Conversation starters

Why is it hard to start connections? Identify personal barriers and share strategies to overcome them.

What prevents a conversation from progressing naturally, and what makes it flow more easily?

To what degree do you focus on external factors (e.g., how much time they have, how close they live, how easy it would be to meet) versus personality factors (e.g., how much you genuinely want to meet them and how much they may want to meet you)?

Exercise 2 - 3 Conversation follow-up

Follow-up Conversation – Having made a positive or at least neutral impression in a previous interaction, choose that conversation and now continue with a follow-up discussion.

Find common ground – Ask about shared experiences or interests.

Look for cues to follow up – Listen for topics or activities that could extend into the future.

Reflect on the ease of the flow – What makes the conversation engaging and effortless? Incorporate storytelling, humor, and curiosity to keep the exchange lively.

Optional extra: Use a 45-second or 1-minute hourglass and observe what happens to the conversation flow when you limit any story or joke to that time frame—then switch and let the other person speak.

Optional: Opportunity for feedback

How easy do you make it for others to approach you? Do you consciously try to be friendly, warm, kind, and engaging?

Depending on the trust and comfort level within the course, you can ask for feedback on how at ease the other participants felt while conversing with you.

Session 2: Taking the first step: Why starting out feels hard and how to overcome it

Exercise 2 - 4 Suggesting a follow up

The final step is now practicing how a follow-up might look—such as a one-on-one conversation over coffee, a shared activity like sports, or attending an organized group event together.

How do you negotiate the location, time, and activity in a way that works for both of you? How do you decline politely if you're not interested while keeping the conversation open and respectful?

Saying yes or no - expectation management

Saying Yes - Initially, the other person doesn't hold much personal meaning for you, nor do you for them. You lack shared goodwill, trust, assurance, and common memories—all the things that naturally develop later in a friendship. At this stage, all you have is some curiosity and, ideally, a bit of goodwill based on your first impression. That may not seem like much, but for some, it's enough to expect a reasonably enjoyable meet-up.

Saying No - At the same time, be selective. You don't have to follow up with everyone—take your time and focus on one person at a time.

It's also completely okay, and even appropriate, to politely decline if you notice that the other person is very keen but you're simply not feeling a strong connection.

Examples of polite ways to say no:

"I enjoyed meeting you, but I don't think we're a great fit for regular meet-ups."

"I'm sorry, but I don't feel the same anticipation for meeting up again, and I want to be fair and honest with you about it."

Homework Conversation Challenge

Start at least three new conversations during the week and reflect on the experience.

What is one thing that makes you want to follow up with someone?

What story or detail that you shared do you think made others interested in following up with you? Did you also manage to follow up with one of these people and invite them to a second get-together?

Note: The theory of the process of building a friendship is explained in the appendix and the book 'Practical Friendship'

Session 3: Becoming the kind of person others want to befriend

Starting discussion 3 - 1: Traits of close friends

5 min write down

Think about your close friends, what traits do they have - what makes them special?

Share and 10 min discussion in groups of three

Mini talk - presentation of key personality traits conducive to friendship

What are the core traits of a good friend - honesty, kindness, humor, reliability proactiveness, what others are there ?

Exercise 3 - 2: What do you value most in your (potential friends) ? And how do you rate up yourself?

As a start just mark the three most significant traits x, both for yourself as well as what you value in others. Rating is just optional, and may also feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar to some people without a rigorous self-test to back this up.

Personality Traits	Rate yourself (1-5)	What do you value(1-5)
Honesty and authenticity		
Acceptance, tolerance		
Humility, interest in others		
Reliability and consistency		
Fun and humour		
Kindness and warmth		
Virtue and good character		
Intelligence, curiosity		
Positivity, hope and seeing good		
Proactiveness and consideration		
Energy and excitement		
Social ease and agreeableness		
Patience and peace		

Session 3: Becoming the kind of person others want to befriend

Exercise 3-3: Discuss the strengths and how they form into roles

Pair with someone and discuss which one of these traits you each value in friendships. Do you have a close friend who really comes close to an ideal of what you value? Or do you have a few who fulfill different roles?

Then, discuss with your discussion partner to what degree the value is very much self-focused (essentially looking more for someone very similar to yourself) or to what degree you are balanced.

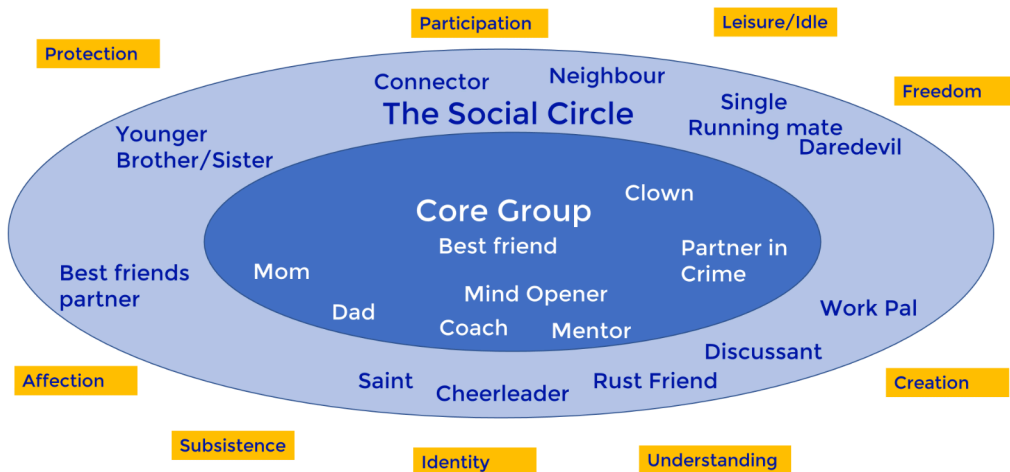
Finally, discuss to what degree your discussion partner agrees with your self-assessment.

Optional Exercise - Discussion:

Guess the key strengths of each person at the table and what they value most in their friends.

Then, consider having a group discussion on whether their own views align with how others perceive them.

Mini-talk - presentation of key roles (roles from 'Practical Friendship')



Session 3: Becoming the kind of person others want to befriend

Discussion 3-4 Friendship roles - general discussion

Do you believe that friendship roles provide an accurate model of the dynamics of friendship?

How can we think about roles without making friendships transactional, but instead remain appreciative and grateful? How can we avoid categorizing people, placing them into fixed roles from which they cannot escape? In the extreme, do we risk objectifying them?

Which role do you appreciate most? Are all roles equally valuable or supportive? What does reciprocity or balance truly mean? It's important to understand that reciprocity refers to overall balance, not a direct, itemized exchange or a "payment in kind" for each role.

Is it better to have one or two friends who fulfill all roles at once, or several friends who contribute in different ways?

Homework:

Pay attention to one or two key friendship traits and practice them in daily interactions

Additional Homework - take the VIA IS Strength test
<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

Session 4: Deepening friendships through meaningful interactions

Discussion 4-1: What makes a conversation meaningful

Describe good conversations you recently experienced. What made them special?

Minitalk - What is the role of immediacy ?

The best precondition for a good conversation is ensuring full attention and presence with each other.

Author Kira Asatryan writes about this in her book *Stop Being Lonely*, emphasizing the importance of visibility and presence on all “channels”—meaning no mediation through screens or technology. When you are in the same room and fully paying attention to each other, you can observe facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and small details more clearly. This gives you a better gut feeling about how the conversation is developing. While direct eye contact may feel uncomfortable for some, it is something you can gradually work towards.

Another important factor is the presence of screens (phones, computers, or even a TV playing in the background), which can distract from giving each other full attention.

Discussion 4-2: How are your experiences both with technology mediating or present?

Have you noticed these issues? Do you sometimes call friends or acquaintances via Teams, Skype ? And how are your own habits in taking out a smartphone in a conversation or checking your apple watch or some other screen?

Session 4: Deepening friendships through meaningful interactions

Minitalk - Key elements of deep conversation

1. Active Listening – How well do you listen?

Making eye contact (if comfortable), giving nonverbal responses (nodding, facial expressions), asking follow-up questions, and avoiding interruptions or shifting focus too quickly.

2. Sharing & Vulnerability – How much do you open up?

Gradual self-disclosure builds trust—starting small and going deeper over time. Mutual vulnerability fosters closeness and strengthens connections.

3. Micro-Positivity (Gottman's Bids for Connection)

Small verbal and nonverbal signals of warmth and engagement, such as smiling, acknowledging emotions, saying "That's interesting, tell me more," and mirroring positive energy, help build rapport and connection.

Exercise 4-3

You pair up in pairs and share stories. One person gets to speak once for 3 minutes with the other person not interrupting, only nodding, grunting or using facial expressions.

Afterwards you switch, and then you just shortly make sure you don't forget the experience.

Exercise 4-4

Then with a second story they get to speak once more for another 5 minutes, but with the other person allowed to ask some questions. This allows for questions, expressing verbally agreement, and positive encouragements.

After both have done their story, you can discuss how the two experiences were different.

Finally discuss how strong the temptation was to interrupt and switch to an own story, enhancement, or a „me too but more“ story.

Session 4: Deepening friendships through meaningful interactions

Optional: Increasingly intimate questions technique - possibly as an additional optional session

The activities of or attitudes behind active listening and emotional sharing are key to slowly deepening relationships. As this is a key skill, it might be good to expand the time dedicated to this aspect.

Depending on the requests or feedback of the participant, it might be advisable to allow for more time after session four to keep exploring these active listening situations or to allow for an optional extra session.

There are many commercial question sets out there, and in the „Recipe Book & Tool set“ we list a few of them, but a prominent one is the 36 questions by Aron & Aron.

<https://www.mindbrained.org/2020/09/the-social-brain-in-practice-36-questions-for-making-friends/>

Minitalk: Vulnerability, speed of sharing and boundaries

Whilst sharing and listening are valuable activities to deepen the common relationship, they need to be appropriate to the current state of emotional attachment and relationship progression.

Oversharing at the beginning devalues the meaning of sharing. It also puts pressure on the other person to reciprocate. This pressure might feel inappropriate to a more shy, private or vulnerable person.

Thus as much as sharing is to be encouraged overall, you need to listen to yourself how you are feeling about sharing or not sharing certain stories or experiences at the level the relationship or acquaintanceship has progressed to.

Homework: One Deeper Conversation

Have a conversation where you open up about something personal

Session 5: Keeping friendships alive and resilient

Exercise 5 - 1: What happens when you encounter / meetup with a friend

Think of a time when you had a great social interaction that left you feeling energized. What made it so engaging? What did you do? How did you feel? What made it so memorable.

What made the difference from „OK“ to „good“ to „great“ ?

Share in groups of three, five minutes each, then discussion for five minutes looking for common elements.

Minitalk: Elements of the encounter - activities

In the encounter the personalities of the people come together, and make the various activities more fun and colourful (ideally) and through this experience build relationship attitudes.

Activities			
Dirt time & Hanging out		Encouragement & Challenge	
Working together		Effect change	
Deep listening & sharing		Guidance and giving direction	
Being there / crisis support		Exploration and discovery	
Practical help		Teaching and learning	
Embedding / circle Bonding		Generosity & gift giving	
Communion & Hospitality		Vocal & visible support	

Exercise 5-2 Which of these activities are particularly meaning to you, rate them from a scale of 1-5

Session 5: Keeping friendships alive and resilient

Discussion 5-3: What is the outcome of a good encounter

Discuss in groups of three how you look back on a good encounter. What do you remember? How does it make you feel?

Minitalk: Outcome of the encounter - memory and relationship attitudes

Positive Short-Term Memory

People seek to repeat experiences that feel good. If each interaction leaves a positive emotional imprint, it builds momentum for future meetings.

Long term Positive memory - Love tank

Every good interaction adds emotional deposits into the friendship. This helps friendships withstand challenges, conflicts, or temporary distance. These deposits materialise in many forms, such as trust, loyalty, common memories etc.

These aspects are summarised as **relationship attitudes**, that build between friends over time. They are what makes a friendship valuable and unique.

And it is taking 20h of encounters like these to build a friendly acquaintanceship, 50h to build a starting friendship and 200h to build a good friendship.

Discussion 5-4: Alive or fading friendships

According to Alberoni - a friendship where the two friends look forward with anticipation to the next encounter is alive, a friendship where the two lose that interest and anticipation is fading.

Discuss in the group. Share stories where you review past friendships and wonder how they faded or expired.

Session 5: Keeping friendships alive and resilient

Why Do Friendships Need Repair?

Even strong friendships experience misunderstandings, distance, or hurt feelings. Most friendships don't break from one incident—they fade due to unresolved small tensions. Well-repaired friendships often become stronger than before.

How to Apologize with Sincerity:

A sincere apology is not just words—it includes:

- Acknowledging the harm (“I realize that when I canceled last-minute, it hurt you.”)
- Expressing regret (“I feel bad about it and didn't intend to dismiss your time.”)
- Taking responsibility (“I should have communicated better.”)
- Offering repair (“Next time, I'll make sure to let you know earlier or reschedule properly.”)

Apologies without action feel empty - make sure the other side feels your sincerity.

Exercise: Practicing Apology and Repair

1. Think of a minor friendship mistake: cancel plans, not checking in, saying something insensitive. Pair up and take turns practicing a repair statement using the four apology steps.

2. Think of a “medium”, i.e. not minor friendship mistake: Gossiping, standing your friend up, not having their back in an important situation. Pair up and first give an excuse, then afterwards give a genuine apology. How did it feel different to you giving either and your partner receiving either?

Discussion: When to repair vs. when to let go

How do you know a friendship is worth repairing? When does it make sense to let a friendship fade away instead of forcing a repair? Is it possible to put a friendship “on ice”, i.e. freezing it for later revisit?

Homework I

Reconnect Challenge - reach out to an old friend or someone you have lost touch with.

Homework II

Revisit the connection journal from session 1: with the insights from the last sessions, how do you see the people I listed there now? Which ones energize me, which ones do I energize in our encounters, so that I genuinely want to meet them again?

Session 6: Creating lasting social belonging

Exercise 6-1: Warm places

"Think of a time when you felt a strong sense of belonging. What was it about that place, group, or experience that made you feel included?"

Share with a partner, then listen to their example, then discuss.

Mini-Talk: The Elements of Belonging & Social Identity

Belonging is not just about having friends—it's about feeling embedded in a social environment that nurtures connection. What makes a group feel like a tribe?

- Shared interests or values (e.g., sports, hobbies, professional circles, cultural groups).
- A sense of purpose or contribution (e.g., volunteering, activism, faith-based communities)
- Regular, structured interactions (e.g., weekly meetups, group chats, traditions)
- Emotional safety & authenticity (you feel comfortable being yourself)

Group Discussion 6-2: Which places in your city or wider environment feel like this?

Which places feel like this? Get participants to describe them? How open are they - could others go there and feel the same?

Activity 6-3: Identify your current social soil?

make a list of all their current social spaces, including:

Work, family, online communities, hobby groups, faith-based spaces, volunteering, etc.

For each space, they rate it (low, medium, high) on:

- How often do I interact with people there?
- How comfortable do I feel?
- How much potential is there for forming friendships?

Then reflect: Into which of these spaces could I invest more time?

Do I feel already a bit at home at one of these or do I need to branch out more?

Which of the places mentioned in the larger group discussion sounds interesting?

Session 6: Creating lasting social belonging

Note to Course conductor: For the next exercise best have a list of suitable social places in your neighbourhood prepared to give further suggestions to participants. Use

Activity 6-4: Small steps toward new social roots

Pick a new or underutilized social space which you would like to engage with more.

Then think about two or three small actions you could take to start with like: Attending a meetup or event, initiating a conversation with someone new, joining an ongoing group activity (just showing up), contacting someone official from the space for suggestions, ...

Then get into small group or pair discussion:

What challenges might come up? How can they make entry into this group feel easier?

Mini-Talk: Volunteering as a great recipe for gaining connection

One of the most effective ways to find good connection is by volunteering. You meet nice people, and by contributing you make a good impression. There are many side benefits and many opportunities usually also to practice starting and building connections, as people are generally also grateful and appreciative for your contribution.

Note also the leaflet - Ways out of loneliness - volunteering (Wege aus der Einsamkeit Gestalten) for further information.

Homework: Join a new club or strengthen ties in an existing one

Execute the actions you identified in activity 6-4, which one felt easy, which one was difficult. Did people welcome you or act rather indifferent? Did you help or contribute or rather consume and utilise what was offered?

Optional Session 7: Discussing value-based topics without moralizing- Outline

Exercise 7-1: What makes these topics so difficult

"Think of a time when a discussion about politics or religion became tense. What made it difficult?" Share a past such difficult experience. What helped to defuse tension?

Mini-Talk: The principles of constructive dialogue

Why Do These Conversations Often Go Wrong? People feel attacked or judged, conversations become about "winning" rather than understanding, assumptions and stereotyping escalate conflict.

Key Guidelines for Keeping the Discussion Open-Ended:

1. Curiosity Over Judgment – Approach the conversation as an opportunity to learn, not to convince. 2. Clarifying Instead of Arguing – Ask "What makes you feel strongly about this?" instead of "How can you believe that?" 3. Recognizing Emotional Investment – People's beliefs are often tied to personal history, identity, or community. 4. Knowing When to Step Back – If a conversation becomes too emotional, it's okay to pause and return later.

Activity 7-2: Practicing Active Listening & Open-Minded Responses

Pairs take turns sharing a belief they hold strongly (it can be political, religious, or general). The listener must respond using these techniques:

1. Reflect back what they heard ("So you feel strongly about X because..."). 2. Ask a neutral follow-up question ("Can you tell me more about what led you to that view?"). 3. Avoid stating their own opinion yet—only seek to understand.

Then switch and repeat, then discuss how it was to listen without preparing a counter-argument.

Activity 7-3: Finding common ground and shared values

Pairs or small groups choose a "divisive" topic (e.g., immigration, environmental policies, religious traditions).

They discuss the deeper values behind their views, using questions like: "What is the core principle that matters to you in this issue?" or "If we strip away specific policies or labels, what do we both care about?". They work together to find common ground—a shared value that both sides can agree on.

The current polarisation of political opinions severely limit choices for making contacts and friendships. Being able to rise above this is important for functioning civil societies and democracies, and a good skill or attitude to pay attention to in the context of such a course.

Appendix: Instructions for trainers or course conductors

Ideally the setting is to have say 20- 30 participants starting, place them in tables of six, and have the individual discussions in groups of three.

These groups can be mixed around within the first three sessions for everyone to get to know the others or most of the others.

Then use the last three sessions to fix the groups and assign people to get closer with people they feel more comfortable with and better to e.g. practice self revelation, active listening and deepening conversation.

The allocation of time between more prescriptive minitalks, possible story readings or story sharings, or larger group discussions and sharings is still unclear. Currently I would think every session to have one or two mini-talks of about 10-15 minutes each. The total time of each session should be about 1h 30min but time could be extended to about 2h.

Eventually I would also place Youtube videos for specimen talks online, to facilitate the courses being held by small groups without specific trainers being available.

Appendix : Max Neef Needs

A possible variation of the definition of loneliness is as follows: **People are lonely because their actual social relationships do not meet their social needs.** The Chilean economist and human rights activist Manfred Max-Neef (1986/1991) developed a system of such needs, which he considers fundamental for good human development. Unlike the needs researcher Maslow, he sees these needs as complementary (relevant at the same time) rather than hierarchical.

Subsistence: Ensuring physical and mental well-being through nourishment, shelter, and balanced daily life.

Protection: Feeling safe and cared for through cooperation, planning, and supportive social structures.

Affection: Building emotional warmth and closeness through respectful, shared care in nurturing relationships.

Understanding: Expanding knowledge and perspective by exploring, learning, analyzing, and communicating openly.

Participation: Actively contributing to community life through cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibilities.

Idleness: Allowing unstructured time to relax, daydream, and imagine for mental and emotional renewal.

Creation: Generating new ideas and works, expressing skills and curiosity in supportive environments.

Identity: Developing self-esteem and belonging through cultural expression, personal growth, and consistent relationships.

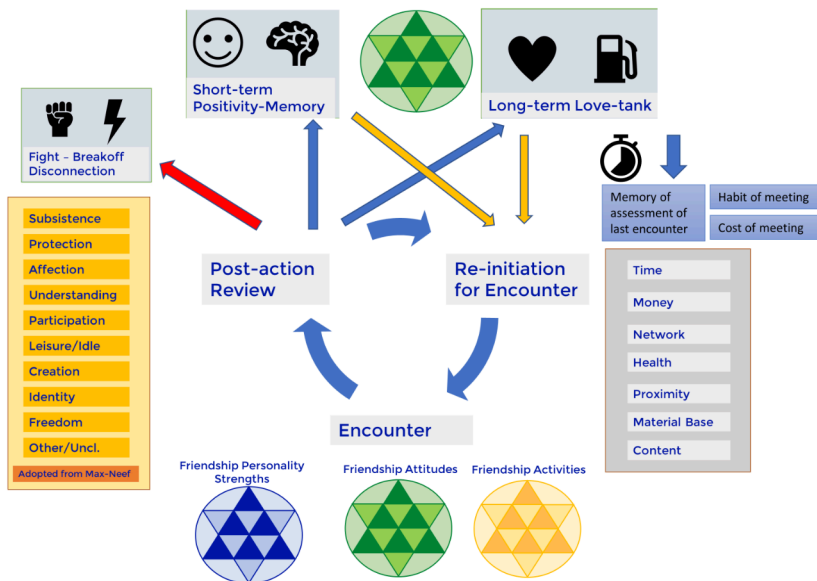
Freedom: Maintaining autonomy and choice, accepting difference, and responsibly exercising opportunities for change.

Appendix: Process map (Practical Friendship 7.2, 7.3)

The friendship process is best understood as an ongoing cycle of encounters, reflection, and renewal. Each encounter—whether a deep conversation, shared activity, or a simple moment of support—serves as the building block of a friendship. Alberoni describes these encounters as the essence of friendship, emphasizing that they exist outside market-like exchanges and instead create meaningful, sometimes even magical, moments of connection. The experience of the moment, whether through intellectual engagement, shared laughter, or silent companionship, strengthens the friendship bond.

Gottman’s research on positive bids complements this idea by highlighting how small interactions, such as showing interest in a friend’s story or acknowledging their emotions, contribute to strengthening relationships. These micro-interactions, when responded to positively, accumulate over time, reinforcing connection and trust. Nelson’s friendship triangle (positivity, consistency, and vulnerability) further explains how friendships deepen when these three elements grow together in balance.

Chapman’s love tank theory applies here as well—friendships are sustained by the ongoing accumulation of shared memories, appreciation, and mutual care. Each encounter contributes to the “friendship bank,” creating long-term bonds. When friendships are actively maintained through meaningful interactions, they continue to grow, reinforcing both emotional closeness and the desire to reconnect.



Appendix: Roles in Friendship

Friendships can be understood through two concentric circles: the Core Group and the Social Circle. Each plays a different role in providing emotional support, companionship, and engagement in our lives.

Core Group: The Inner Circle of Vital Friendships

The Core Group consists of best and closest friends—those who provide deep emotional support and play essential roles in personal well-being. These relationships are characterized by loyalty, trust, and consistent presence. Key roles include:

- Best Friend – The one with shared history, always supportive and loyal.
- Coach – Pushes you to achieve goals, offering encouragement and motivation.
- Partner-in-Crime – Shares a passion or purpose, creating strong intellectual or creative bonds.
- Clown – Brings joy and humor, making life more enjoyable.
- Mind Opener – Exposes new ideas, perspectives, and experiences.
- Mentor – Provides wisdom and guidance for important decisions.
- Mom/Dad Figure – Offers unconditional care, warmth, and a safe emotional space.

These friends function like a "hero's party"—each bringing different strengths to the group dynamic.

Social Circle: The Broader Network of Connection and Support

The Social Circle consists of good friends, acquaintances, and situational companions who provide companionship, fun, and networking opportunities. These friendships are valuable but not as deeply embedded in daily life. Key roles include:

- Cheerleader – Encourages and supports, boosting confidence.
- Connector – Introduces people, expands social networks.
- Daredevil – Promotes adventure, excitement, and risk-taking.
- Rust Friend – An old friend with shared history, though contact is infrequent.
- Neighbour – Provides practical support and casual companionship.
- Work Pal – Makes work enjoyable, offers professional camaraderie.
- Discussant – Engages in intellectual conversations on shared interests.
- Saint/Idol – Inspires by embodying admired qualities.

While the Core Group provides emotional depth, the Social Circle enriches life through variety, support, and shared experiences. Understanding these friendship types helps cultivate stronger, more fulfilling social connections.

Friendship and connection books - a reading list

Starters

Shumway - the Friendship Formula - simple and enjoyable introduction into friendship
Kira Asatryan - Stop being Lonely - basic mechanics of relationship building

Children Books:

C.S. Lewis: Chronicles of Narnia
Lindgren: Ronja Robbers Daughter

Light reading:

Millington 2019 - Friendship formula

Thorough material by renowned researchers

Dunbar 2021 Friends
Franco 2022 - Platonic

Female friendships

Degges-White and Borzumato-Gainey 2011
Jackson 2024
Nelson 2016

Male friendships:

Greif 2009

Philosophical:

Nehamas 2016

Old school

C.S. Lewis - four loves (also excellent as Audiobook),
Aristotle Nikomachean Ethics,
Cicero De Amicitia

Further books are in the literature list at www.initiative-gemeinsamkeit.de

