

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY & BELONGING

BUILDING HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

Creating trust, acceptance and growth

ARTICLE 2 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Building Healthy Friendships

Creating trust, acceptance and growth

Friendship is one of the most important contributors to emotional wellbeing. Good friends provide encouragement during difficult times, celebrate our successes and remind us that we are not alone. Healthy friendships can improve confidence, reduce loneliness and create a sense of belonging that helps us navigate life's challenges.

For many LGBTQ+ people, friendships can become particularly significant. While some people experience acceptance from family members, others may face misunderstanding, rejection or distance from those closest to them. In these situations, friendships often become a source of stability, acceptance and unconditional support. Many people speak of their friends as their "chosen family" because of the love, trust and understanding these relationships provide.

However, not every friendship is healthy. Just as in any community, friendships can sometimes become controlling, one-sided or emotionally draining. Building supportive relationships involves recognising what healthy friendship looks like, understanding the importance of mutual respect and learning how to establish boundaries that protect everyone's wellbeing.

This article explores how healthy friendships support confidence and resilience, the qualities that strengthen meaningful relationships and practical ways to develop friendships that encourage authenticity, trust and personal growth.

Why Friendships Matter

Friendships contribute to almost every aspect of emotional wellbeing.

Supportive friends can help us:

- Feel accepted.

Build confidence.

Reduce feelings of loneliness.

Manage stress.

Celebrate achievements.

Cope during difficult times.

Learn from different perspectives.

Feel connected to something bigger than ourselves.

Strong friendships remind us that we are valued not because we are perfect, but because we are ourselves.

What Makes a Friendship Healthy?

Healthy friendships are built on mutual respect rather than obligation or control.

Characteristics of healthy friendships include:

- Trust.

Honesty.

Respect.

Kindness.

Reliability.

Acceptance.

Emotional safety.

Shared support.

Open communication.

Mutual enjoyment.

Healthy friendships allow both people to grow without fear of judgement or manipulation.

Authenticity Strengthens Friendships

One of the greatest gifts of genuine friendship is feeling able to be yourself.

Authentic friendships allow people to:

- Express their identity openly.

Share thoughts and feelings honestly.

Talk about challenges without fear of rejection.

Celebrate successes together.

Feel accepted without pretending to be someone else.

When friendships are based on authenticity, confidence naturally grows.

Trust Takes Time

Trust is one of the foundations of every healthy friendship.

Trust develops gradually through:

- Keeping promises.

Respecting confidentiality.

Being reliable.

Listening without judgement.

Offering support.

Showing consistency over time.

Trust cannot be forced—it is built through repeated positive experiences.

Good Friendships Involve Mutual Support

Healthy friendships involve giving and receiving support.

Support may include:

- Listening without interrupting.

Checking in during difficult times.

Celebrating achievements.

Encouraging personal growth.

Respecting boundaries.

Offering practical help when appropriate.

Healthy friendships are balanced rather than one person always carrying the emotional responsibility.

Respecting Differences

The LGBTQ+ community is wonderfully diverse.

People may have different:

- Sexual orientations.

Gender identities.

Cultural backgrounds.

Religious beliefs.

Political opinions.

Disabilities.

Ages.

Life experiences.

Healthy friendships recognise that people do not have to agree on everything to treat one another with kindness and respect.

Curiosity and openness often strengthen relationships far more than assumptions.

Recognising Unhealthy Friendships

Not every friendship is supportive.

Signs of an unhealthy friendship may include:

- Constant criticism.

Jealousy.

Manipulation.

Lack of respect for boundaries.

Gossip or betrayal.

Emotional control.

One-sided effort.

Feeling anxious rather than supported after spending time together.

Healthy friendships should leave you feeling respected, even when disagreements occur.

Setting Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries help friendships remain respectful and balanced.

Healthy boundaries might include:

- Saying no when necessary.

Protecting your personal time.

Respecting each other's privacy.

Communicating honestly.

Taking space when needed.

Avoiding unhealthy dependence.

Boundaries are not barriers to friendship—they help friendships remain healthy over time.

Handling Disagreements Respectfully

Even strong friendships experience disagreements.

Healthy conflict involves:

- Listening carefully.

Avoiding personal attacks.

Speaking calmly.

Taking responsibility for mistakes.

Apologising when appropriate.

Looking for solutions together.

Disagreements do not have to end friendships when both people remain respectful.

Celebrating Each Other's Success

Confidence grows when people celebrate one another rather than compete.

Healthy friends:

- Encourage growth.

Celebrate achievements.

Support personal goals.

Feel genuinely happy for each other's success.

Inspire one another to flourish.

Friendship is strengthened through encouragement rather than comparison.

Building New Friendships

Making new friends can feel daunting, particularly after experiences of rejection.

Helpful ways to build friendships include:

- Joining community groups.

Volunteering.

Attending LGBTQ+ events.

Joining sports or hobby clubs.

Participating in online communities.

Being open to conversation.

Taking friendships one step at a time.

Meaningful friendships often develop slowly through shared experiences.

Becoming the Friend You Hope to Find

One of the best ways to build healthy friendships is to practise the qualities you value in others.

Consider:

- Listening attentively.

Being reliable.

Showing empathy.

Respecting boundaries.

Communicating honestly.

Being kind.

Celebrating others' successes.

Healthy friendships are built through mutual care and respect.

Key Takeaways

Healthy friendships provide emotional support, encouragement and a sense of belonging.

Trust, honesty and mutual respect are the foundations of meaningful relationships.

Authenticity allows friendships to develop more deeply.

Boundaries help friendships remain balanced and healthy.

It is important to recognise unhealthy patterns and protect your wellbeing.

Diversity within the LGBTQ+ community should be respected and celebrated.

Strong friendships develop gradually through shared experiences and mutual support.

Final Thoughts

Healthy friendships are among the greatest sources of confidence, resilience and emotional wellbeing. They provide safe spaces where people can be themselves, share their experiences openly and feel accepted without judgement. For many LGBTQ+ people, these friendships become a powerful reminder that they are not alone and that meaningful, supportive relationships are possible.

While building trust takes time, every genuine connection contributes to a stronger sense of belonging. Healthy friendships are not based on perfection—they are built on kindness, honesty, respect and a willingness to grow together. They encourage us to become more confident, more compassionate and more accepting of ourselves as well as others.

As you continue to build relationships throughout your life, remember that you deserve friendships where your identity is respected, your boundaries are honoured and your wellbeing matters. By surrounding yourself with people who celebrate your authentic self and by offering the same support in return, you create a community that helps everyone thrive.