

Five intimate friendships is the optimal number – I scrape two

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. How important are your friends to you?
2. How many friends close or intimate friends do you have?
3. What makes a good friend?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

habits

nervous

research

strange

trust

1. If you are _____, you are feeling excited, worried or slightly afraid.
I was _____ before my Spanish test.
2. _____ is the detailed study of something to discover new information.
Nancy does _____ about love and health.
3. If something is _____, it makes you feel uncomfortable.
It felt _____ to see my ex-girlfriend again.
4. When you _____ someone or something, you think they are honest.
We have been friends for ten years and we _____ each other completely.
5. A _____ is something that you do often or regularly.
I have the terrible _____ of interrupting people when they're talking.

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active

endorphins

friendship

regular

spoiled

6. A _____ is a relationship between people who are friends.
I never want to lose Sam's _____; he means a lot to me.
7. _____ is used for describing things that people frequently do or something that often happens.
My dog needs _____ walks to the park, or she starts to eat the furniture.
8. _____ are hormones that your body produces when you do activities that you enjoy.
When I go running, my body produces lots of _____
9. If something is _____, it is working or moving.
When you do exercise, your muscles are _____, and more blood moves through them.
10. To _____ means to affect something to make it worse or less attractive.
I have put salt in the cake by accident, and it's going to _____ the taste.

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Emma Beddington

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- 1 I recently listened to Elizabeth Day talking about her book *Friendaholic* and her problems with having too many friends. It made me feel nervous. I also feel like that when I read Robin Dunbar's famous research on how many relationships we can keep. Five intimate friendships is the best number – I only have two. Dunbar said that we can have 150 people close enough that it wouldn't be strange to have a drink with them. That's Dunbar's number: 150! I would need to count everyone who walks their dog on my route, my whole pilates class and half the street to reach 150.
- 2 It's easy to feel like I'm not a good enough friend. I haven't always been a good friend. I don't mean that I steal boyfriends or that my friends can't trust me. I'm just not good at planning, and I'm poorly organised. I lived in Brussels for a long time. There, people made friends and forgot them easily. It gave me bad habits, I think.
- 3 I'm trying to be better because I really like the few friends I have. I want to be a bigger part of their lives. But how? My best friend lives more than four hours away. I have a good friend in the US and many in the UK and Europe.
- 4 We became friends because we enjoyed spending time with each other. Now that is difficult to plan and expensive. We can't just quietly sit on a sofa with a bag of crisps each. Well, we can, but it usually feels like it's not enough.
- 5 It's silly because that's what makes friendships: regular time together, sitting side by side. Dunbar studied what friendship does to the endorphin system. The system becomes active when you spend time together. This happens with eating, drinking, laughing and telling stories together.
- 6 Like being a parent, the important things between friends happen in small, everyday moments. Nothing special. Just being there is an act of love and friendship.
- 7 It's hard to be there for each other when we're miles away. If being near our friends makes us happier, why don't we all do it? Work, homes, kids, and parents make it more complicated.
- 8 Could we try to make our good friends become our neighbours? I'd probably spoil it, but it would be wonderful to have a chance to try.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Match and complete the sentences about the article.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. In her book, Elizabeth Day describes ... | a. close enough to have a drink together. |
| 2. Dunbar said that we can keep a group of 150 people ... | b. for the writer's friendship habits. |
| 3. The writer feels that she hasn't ... | c. to have friends as neighbours. |
| 4. Living in Brussels was bad ... | d. the problem of having too many friends. |
| 5. The writer says that her friends ... | e. with friends makes endorphins active. |
| 6. It is difficult and expensive ... | f. together is what makes a friendship. |
| 7. Dunbar studied how being ... | g. for the writer to see her friends. |
| 8. Just spending time ... | h. been a good friend. |
| 9. The writer would love ... | i. live far away from her. |

4 Key language

a. Choose a gerund or infinitive to complete the sentences.

1. It wouldn't be strange *having / to have* a drink with them.
2. I would need *counting / to count* everyone who walks their dog.
3. I'm just not good at *planning / to plan*.
4. I'm trying *being / to be* better because I really like the few friends I have.
5. I want *being / to be* a bigger part of their lives.
6. We became friends because we enjoyed *spending / to spend* time with each other.
7. This happens with *eating / to eat*, drinking, laughing and telling stories together.
8. If *being / to be* near our friends makes us happier, why don't we all do it?
9. Could we try *making / to make* our good friends become our neighbours?
10. It would be wonderful *having / to have* a chance *trying / to try*.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Five close friends is the best number.”
- “Having friends is important if you want to be happy.”

6 In your own words

a. Create an infographic, short video, or blog post with top tips to make and / or keep friends.

E.g., Ten Things to Do with Friends

b. Present your idea to the class.