

I was always the first to message friends. When I stopped I lost my entire circle. Am I a crap person?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

1. When was the last time you spoke to your oldest friend? Who contacted who?
2. Is it difficult to maintain friendships? Why?
3. What is the most important quality a friend can have?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

social circle	granted	maintain	virtues
atrocious	infer	outlet	neurodivergence
bear the brunt of	bust	voluntarily	vices
empirics	initiate	overstep	suboptimal
asymmetry	neglect	spontaneously	unjust

1. a difference in how someone's brain works, for example autism or ADHD

2. very bad _____
3. a way to express feelings, energy or ideas _____
4. to keep something going _____
5. not the best; less good than it could be _____
6. because you choose to, not because someone makes you _____
7. to understand something from clues, not from direct information _____
8. bad habits or bad qualities _____
9. a situation where two sides are not equal or balanced _____
10. to receive the worst part of something difficult or unpleasant _____
11. used to admit that something is true before adding another point _____

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12. the group of people you know and spend time with _____
13. good qualities _____
14. to break or damage something; informally, to injure part of your body _____
15. to go too far or do more than is acceptable _____
16. to start something _____
17. a lack of care or attention _____
18. unfair _____
19. practical evidence or real examples, not just theory _____
20. naturally, without planning it in advance _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The project manager _____ the meeting by outlining the problem and inviting everyone to suggest solutions.
2. She offered to help _____, even though nobody expected her to stay after work.
3. The service at the restaurant was _____; we waited an hour, and when the food arrived, half the order was wrong.
4. Curiosity and patience are useful _____ when you are trying to understand someone else's point of view.
5. During the busiest part of the project, the junior team members [longer word WoL] the extra work.
6. The arrangement was _____: it solved the immediate problem, but it created several new ones.
7. After leaving university, she found it difficult to keep the same _____ because everyone had moved to different cities.

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8. From the way he avoided the topic, I _____ that he already knew about the problem.
9. The decision felt _____ because the people with the least power suffered the biggest consequences.
10. The proposal was attractive in theory, but the _____ suggested that it would be difficult to put into practice.
11. The novel presents ambition one of the character's worst _____; it always got him into trouble.
12. Greater awareness of _____ has helped some workplaces rethink communication, deadlines, and expectations.
13. Writing in a journal gave him a(n) _____ for thoughts he found difficult to say aloud.
14. I didn't want to _____ by making decisions that were really hers to make.
15. Years of _____ had left the building unsafe, though you could still see how elegant it had once been.
16. It takes regular effort to _____ professional relationships after a project ends.
17. _____, the plan is risky, but doing nothing may be even worse.
18. There was a clear _____ in their friendship: one person shared everything, while the other revealed almost nothing.
19. They hadn't planned to speak so honestly, but the conversation developed _____.
20. He _____ his ankle during the hike and had to cancel the rest of the trip.

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You cannot infer that people never liked you just because they have not reached out, writes advice columnist Eleanor Gordon-Smith. The question is whether you can accept this imbalance.

Eleanor Gordon-Smith

23 April, 2026

- 1 I'm a 43-year-old man. Well-educated, with a healthy social skill level. I've always been surrounded by friends. Always invited to parties and events, both happy and sad, without effort on my part. Last year I moved from the city to a country farm and I came to the realisation that I had been the one maintaining contact. I was the one initiating every time, and when I stopped, they all went away. We're not talking just one friend either. I'm talking full-on loss of an entire social circle.
- 2 It's been a rough year, socially and emotionally speaking. My partner has borne the brunt of it, being my only contact and social outlet. I just don't understand it. If I had been an atrocious person then people wouldn't have interacted with me like they did, seemingly voluntarily and happily. I was invited to every wedding, engagement, birthday, hiking trip, you name it. I was made to feel welcome and wanted. As long as, it turns out, I was the one sending the first message, making the first call.
- 3 Am I a crap person in need of extensive therapy, or am I missing something?
- 4 Eleanor says: A dear friend of mine busted his leg a while ago. Got hit by a motorcyclist while he was riding his bike. Boot on the foot, needed a scooter to get around, the whole thing. Early on after his surgery he sent a spreadsheet around to his friends: I'm going to need some help, thanks so much for being someone I can ask, if you could write yourself down for a day and a time we'll make sure the trash gets taken out and the cats' litter gets changed.
- 5 I have no idea how much we would have gone over to help if he hadn't asked. I like to think it's a lot, but empirics suggest I'm overestimating. All of us have wondered why our friends aren't coming through like we expected after a big life change or a crisis, so we probably overestimate how much we'd do when we're the friend.
- 6 My point is, if my injured friend had measured our care by how much we independently and spontaneously came over to help, he might have sat home sore and lonely wondering why nobody cared.

By reaching out first, he made the metric how many people actually did help: how many people care and want to do things for you, not how many people proactively made plans to show that's how they felt.

- 7 Yes – yes – in an ideal world those things don't come apart. Ideally, anyone who likes you is also someone who takes the time to show you that by initiating, following up, calling, keeping in touch. Ideally, there'd be no gaps between what we value and what we find time for in our weeks.
- 8 But there just are gaps. Most people, most of the time, are doing an imperfect job of finding time for the things and people they value. Sometimes it's being harried. Sometimes it's neurodivergence. Sometimes it's shyness about overstepping, being responsible for the plans, deciding we should talk now.
- 9 Sometimes, granted, it's full-on emotional neglect. At the extremes this can be unjust as well as annoying, and you'd rather burn the friendship altogether than abide the asymmetry any longer.
- 10 But a lot of the time we are just being suboptimal friends. Given the gap between what we really do value and what we reliably make time for, you can't infer people never liked you from the fact they haven't reached out. All you can infer is that you're the one who reaches out more. People have different virtues. Yours is that you make more time for the people you care about; you do a better job of showing that you like someone.
- 11 The question then is whether you're prepared to tolerate that asymmetry in order to keep your friendships. The answer might well be "no". But it might help first to ask what else they bring to your friendship, if not proactive reaching out. Are they enthusiastic about the plans, once you make them? Are they kind and attentive, once you're together? You might be learning that you just don't want these relationships any more. But perhaps, instead, their sloppiness about initiating might be made up for in other ways.
- 12 Part of friendship is seeing each other in our virtues and our vices. You've been given a painful lesson about one particular vice these people share. What of their virtues?

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False. Correct the false sentences.

1. The person who needs advice is Elenor Gordon-Smith.
2. The person needing advice is a man in his 40s.
3. The problems started after he moved to the country.
4. He was the one who always sent messages to his friends first.
5. His partner was the only person he socialised with.
6. He thinks he is a bad person.
7. Elenor's friend got hurt riding his bike.
8. Elenor's friend didn't ask any of his friends for help.
9. Elenor suggests that sometimes asymmetry is not the same as neglect.
10. Elenor suggests that he balance the good qualities of his friends along with the bad.

4 Key language

a. In the example below, underline the hypothetical past situation (condition) and circle the hypothetical result.

If I had been an atrocious person, then people wouldn't have interacted with me like they did, seemingly voluntarily and happily.

b. Complete the other two sentences using information from the article, and then do the same.

1. I have no idea how much we would have gone over to help if _____
_____.
2. If my injured friend had measured our care by how much we independently and spontaneously came over to help, _____.

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c. Complete the third conditionals with your own ideas.

1. If I hadn't come to class today, _____.
2. If _____, I would have travelled the world.
3. If my brother had listened, he _____.
4. _____, if had had paid on time.
5. _____, if _____.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- If a friendship takes effort, it is a bad friendship.
- Friends should always put an equal amount of effort into a friendship.
- The best friendships are the ones you've had the longest.

6 In your own words

a. Think about a time when you had a problem with a close friend or family member; either when you stopped talking or had a miscommunication or argument. Your anecdote should include:

- what happened
- why it happened
- how you resolved (or didn't!) the situation
- what would have happened differently if ...

b. Tell your story to a partner. Agree on the best story and who should share it with the class.