

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

Level 2: Intermediate

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.

evidence
atrocious
injured

neglectful
virtues
infer

voluntarily
overstepping
reach out

social circle
vices
imbalance

1. to contact someone, especially to ask for help or to show interest _____
2. extremely bad _____
3. good qualities in a person _____
4. information or facts that help show whether something is true _____
5. not giving enough care or attention to someone or something _____
6. the group of friends and people someone regularly spends time with _____
7. hurt physically _____
8. because you choose to, not because someone forces you _____
9. to understand something from clues, rather than from direct information _____
10. bad habits or negative qualities in a person _____
11. a situation where two sides are not equal or fair _____
12. going too far or doing more than is acceptable _____

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

1. After the accident, he was _____ and had to walk with a stick for several weeks.
2. She didn't say directly that she was unhappy, but I could _____ it from her silence and the way she avoided eye contact.
3. The restaurant was _____: the service was slow, the food was cold, and nobody apologised.
4. He decided to _____ to an old friend he had not spoken to in years and send her a short message.
5. The police had no clear _____, so they could not prove what had really happened.
6. There was an obvious _____ in the relationship: one person always listened, while the other always talked.
7. She helped _____, not because anyone asked her to, but because she wanted to support the team.
8. His main _____ were pride and impatience, and both made it difficult for him to accept criticism.
9. After moving to another city, she found it difficult to build a new _____ and meet people she trusted.
10. The parents were loving, but sometimes _____ because they were so busy that they forgot important details.
11. Honesty and generosity are two _____ that many people value in close friendships.
12. I was afraid of _____, so I asked if she wanted advice before I gave my opinion.

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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 am a 43-year-old man with a good education and normal social skills. I have always had a large social circle. People used to invite someone like me to parties, weddings, birthdays and hiking trips, and I did not have to work hard for it. Last year, I decided to move to a new place: a farm in the country. Then I realised that I had been the one who did most of the work to keep in touch. I was usually the first person to send a message or make a call. I was the one who would call someone, suggest meeting, and make plans. When I stopped, almost everyone disappeared.
- 2 It has been a hard year, socially and emotionally. My partner has had to listen to most of my sadness, because she has been my only real social contact. I do not understand it. If I had been an atrocious person, people would not have interacted with me so happily and voluntarily. They made me feel welcome and wanted. But perhaps that was only true as long as I was the one sending the first message.
- 3 Am I a terrible person who needs therapy, or am I missing something?
- 4 Eleanor says: A close friend of mine once badly injured his leg after a motorbike hit him while he was cycling. After surgery, he sent a spreadsheet to his friends. He explained that he needed help and thanked us for being people he could ask. He asked us to choose a day and time to visit someone who was injured, take out the rubbish, and change the cat litter.
- 5 I do not know how much we would have visited or helped if he had not asked. I would like to think we would have done a lot, but the real evidence suggests I may be wrong. Many of us have wondered why friends did not support us as much as we expected after a crisis.
- 6 My point is this: if my injured friend had judged our care only by how often we came over without being asked, he might have stayed at home feeling sore, lonely and unloved. Instead, by choosing to ask for help, he measured something more useful: how many people were willing to help a friend when he made the need clear.
- 7 In an ideal world, people who love you would always show it. They would start conversations, follow up, call, and keep in touch. There would be no gap between what we value and what we make time for.
- 8 But in real life there are gaps. People are busy, shy, anxious, forgetful, or afraid of overstepping. Sometimes they are neglectful. Sometimes the imbalance in a friendship is unfair and too painful to accept.
- 9 But often people are just imperfect friends. You cannot know they never cared simply because they did not reach out first. You can only know that you usually reach out more. The question is whether you are willing to accept that in order to keep these friendships.
- 10 Before you decide, ask what else they bring. Are they happy when you make plans? Are they kind when you are together? You may decide that these friendships no longer work for you. Or you may find that their vices are balanced by other 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 receiving 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 response 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.