

CIRCLES OF CONNECTION



Since weak social connections can be a significant danger to our health it is worthwhile to explore ways to expand our circle of connections. Vivek Murthy, writing in *Thinking*, describes many ways that we can expand these connections.

Friends who share and sincerely listen to each other have a stronger sense of connection than do those for whom the interactions focus only in one direction. This is one reason why **therapy**, however valuable, **cannot replace truly mutual friendships**.

What makes a relationship “mutual”? **Listening and helping** each other is important, but the **most fundamental element may be what lies beneath those interactions: reciprocal feeling**. Friends want to spend time together and will make the effort to do so. They put each other at ease and strive to understand each other. **They share common interest and respect for each other**. In the most basic terms, friends show that they care for each other, and in so doing, they mirror each other’s human value.

When our friends support us, they remind us that we are worthy of love, which makes us feel better about ourselves. **Caring of others may also strengthen our sense of purpose and meaning**, as it shows us that we have the ability to make others’ lives better. Friendship creates a positive feedback loop, teaching us to relate to ourselves with love even as we relate to our friends.

Friendship needs to be tended with kindness. This **kindness requires openhearted care and trust, empathy and honesty**, and a generous dose of understanding so that the connection can flourish and endure.

A profound side effect of friendship is gratitude: gratitude for the opportunity to **show vulnerability and still be loved**, for the shared trust and time together and the feeling of belonging, which is the ultimate glue that holds friends together.

Love is not just an idea, it is a way of life that is also core to an approach to friendship.

(1) Vivek H. Murthy, *Together*, (New York: Harper Wave, 2020), Summarization of Chapter 7, pp. 211-242.