

SINGAPORE: This pandemic will reveal your real friends. Pay attention to who reaches out.

Even before the coronavirus strengthened its hold on Singapore in March, this sentiment was rife on social media.

The seemingly straightforward argument parrots the platitude that crisis reveals character: These are rough times, so the people who check in are those worth keeping in our lives.

Granted, there is a modicum of truth. Everyone treasures active, two-way friendships, where both parties work to keep the friendship going in good and bad times. These friendships should be effortless but intentional, so neither party has to worry about it fading.

Under the circuit breaker, these friendships would've ideally manifested in frequent Zoom calls or increased text messages that act as temporary stand-ins for the monthly catch-up over food and drink.

Understandably, if these supposedly solid friendships petered out when you most needed them, you might feel resentful.

But, just so we're on the same page, we are in the middle of a pandemic.

PUTTING A PAUSE ON FRIENDSHIP

Considering how 2020 has upended the economy and our general lives, it'd be nice if we could collectively call for friendship timeouts.

This doesn't mean abandoning our nearest and dearest, not least because it's crucial to lean on each other during this time.

But maybe we should abandon all expectations we will be there for each other with the same pre-pandemic intensity.

[READ: Commentary: I cannot now COVID-19: Disrupt or re-define friendships](#)

[READ: Commentary: Why I still stay home most days even though circuit breaker has been lifted](#)

While we're individually drowning in pools of uncertainty and anxiety every day, it'd be selfish and mildly sociopathic to test our friendships or expect the dynamics to remain the same.

Not only should we cut our friends some slack, it's also unrealistic to expect ourselves to continue living by these absolute standards of friendship from the Old Normal.

I, for one, have weeks where I'm anchored in a thick mental fog that I struggle to complete any work, reinforcing the general anxiety around pandemic living. So forgive me but catching up with friends, albeit expectedly cathartic, is a tad less important than trying to keep my head above water.

Moreover, many of us conflate having time with having capacity, making us resentful when we assume reaching out or replying to a text message barely takes a few minutes.

LISTEN: Singapore's 'stay-at-home' order: How to cope with the impact for the Singapore economy



People wearing face masks in Singapore, April 2020. (Photo: The Straits Times)

Cutting ourselves some slack might mean we can feel less guilty when we can't afford a few minutes to talk to supposedly good friends.

In reality, checking in with a friend requires mustering up the mental and emotional bandwidth to actively listen and be there for them.

READ: Why 'stay-at-home' orders in the US 'school' era is hard to do

Unlike family ties and romantic relationships, which come with a minimal sense of obligation, friendship is wholly opt-in. Even before COVID-19, hard work and intention were fully required to keep each other in our busy lives.

With friendships as tough as they are, the last thing we want is another arbitrary gold standard in friendship Olympics to reach for.

That said, it's inevitable that a crisis will sharpen our focus over our hierarchy of priorities. Rather than begrudge certain friends for not reaching out, however, I wondered why I hadn't reached out.

FRIENDSHIP IS A TWO-WAY STREET

During the circuit breaker period, I decided not to ask certain friends to hang out on Zoom or make plans to see them in the New Normal.

In the three tiers of friendship — primary, secondary, and tertiary — these friends fell into the secondary and tertiary circles. From being in the same school clique to sharing relationship struggles, we'd been there for a season but now lead vastly different lives from one another.

Even when we hung out pre-pandemic, our meetups had started veering towards superficial topics and required the distractions of a physical setting, like good food, to ease us into conversation. The current friendship hinged on guilt, obligation and shared history.



So the thought of being on a one-on-one video call felt unnatural and awkward. Video chats feel oddly intimate — the COVID-19 version of after-school phone calls that would stretch for hours, where we jumped from pining over crushes to complaining about family in a single session of vulnerability.

Even texting each other simply to catch up without having plans to meet felt stilted.

With these friends who fell by the wayside, I found myself unexpectedly content with remaining distanced acquaintances or letting the friendship die a slow death, precisely because I couldn't imagine us developing the closeness that was necessary to weather uncertain times together.

Even after the restrictions lifted in Phase 2, I still hadn't sought to rekindle the friendship or acquaintanceship, and neither had they.

reach out, straightforward, platitude, peter out, call for, cut someone some slack, a tad, hang out, fall by the wayside, catch up with,

Who has reached out to you recently?

Who have you reached out to recently?

Has someone not been worth keeping in your life? Why did you think so?

How often do you meet your friends and where do you hang out?

Has COVID-19 affected your friendships?

What do you expect from a friend?

When has a friend leaned on you?

When have you leaned on a friend?

Ideally, how often should friends check in with one another?

A successful friendship hinges on

Have you ever rekindled a friendship?

Who would you like to catch up with?

What is your hierarchy of priorities at this time in your life? 1)

2)

3)

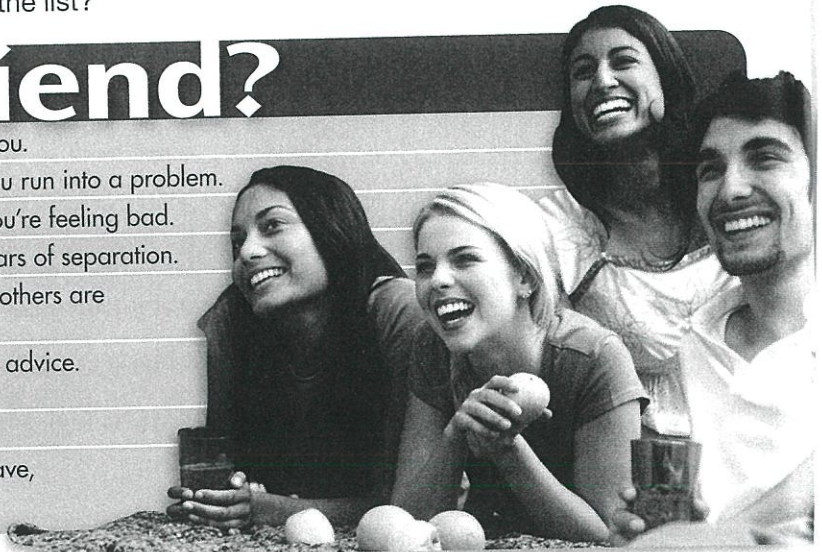
1 STARTING POINT

The nature of friendship

A Read these statements about friendship. Can you explain what they mean? What other statements would you add to the list?

WHAT IS A Friend?

1. A friend is someone who brings out the best in you.
2. Good friends are always happy to help when you run into a problem.
3. A friend is someone who cheers you up when you're feeling bad.
4. True friends don't drift apart even after many years of separation.
5. A real friend will always stand up for you when others are putting you down.
6. Never be afraid to open up and ask a friend for advice. A true friend will never turn you down.
7. Make new friends, but hang on to the old ones.
8. Good friends are hard to come by, harder to leave, and impossible to do without.



"The first statement means a friend inspires you to show all your positive qualities."

B Group work Consider the statements in part A. What makes a good friend? Discuss with your group.

"In my opinion, a good friend is someone who makes you a better person. It's someone who brings out the best in you."

Useful expressions

Expressing opinions

In my opinion, . . .
I have to say that . . .
The way I see it, . . .
Personally, I (don't) think . . .

2 LISTENING & SPEAKING

Friendship among women and men

A Listen to a professor talk about author Deborah Tannen's ideas. In Tannen's opinion, what is the main difference between friendship among men and friendship among women?

B Listen again. According to Tannen, which of these things do male friends often do (M) and which do female friends often do (F)? Write the correct letter.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. are direct and to the point | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. prefer to share factual information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. discuss daily life at length | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. value activities over talk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. reveal private thoughts | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. talk as a way to better understand their lives |

C Group work Do you agree or disagree with Tannen's ideas about friendship? Why or why not?

"I have to say that I think some of her ideas seem to be accurate . . ."

3 GRAMMAR Phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb plus a particle, such as *down, into, out, or up*.
The meaning of a phrasal verb is usually different from the meaning of its parts.

Separable phrasal verbs can take objects before or after the particle.
If the object is a pronoun, it always appears before the particle.

A friend is someone who **brings out** the best in you.

A friend is someone who **brings** the best **out** in you.

A friend is someone who **cheers** you **up** when you're feeling bad.

With **inseparable phrasal verbs**, the object cannot go between the verb and the particle.

Good friends are always happy to help when you **run into** a problem.

Three-word phrasal verbs have a particle and a preposition.

Make new friends, but **hang on to** the old ones.

Intransitive phrasal verbs don't take objects.

True friends don't **drift apart**.

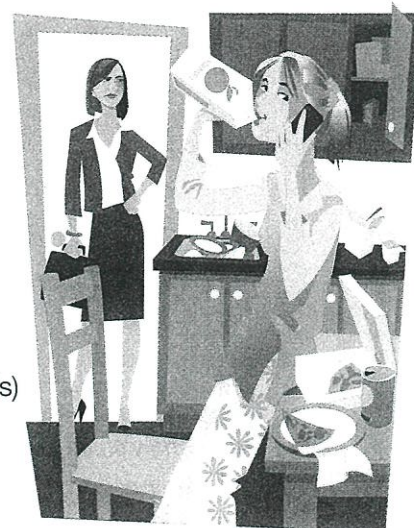
GRAMMAR PLUS see page 106

A Look at the Starting Point on page 2 again. Can you find the phrasal verbs?
Which are separable, inseparable, and/or three-word verbs? Which are also intransitive? Write them in the chart.

Separable	Inseparable	Three-word verbs	Intransitive
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B Complete the questions with the phrasal verbs and objects in parentheses.
Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

- Have you ever had a friend who brought out the worst / brought the worst out (bring out / the worst) in you?
- Have you ever _____ (run into / a friend) that you hadn't seen in a long time?
- Do you usually _____ (stand up for / your friends) when other people criticize them?
- Can you _____ (do without / a cell phone) and still keep in touch with friends?
- When friends ask you for a favor, do you usually say yes, or do you _____ (turn down / them)?
- Do you _____ (hang on to / your old friends) or do you drift apart as time goes by?
- Some people like to _____ (put down / their friends) by insulting them. How would you feel if a friend did that to you?



C Pair work Discuss the questions in part B.

"Have you ever had a friend who brought out the worst in you?"

"Yeah, I once had a really messy roommate. She made me so angry."

4 VOCABULARY

Describing friendship

(7)

A Pair work Complete the chart with the correct parts of speech.

	Verb	Adjective		Verb	Adjective
1.	admire		4.	empathize	
2.		beneficial	5.	endure	
3.	clash		6.		harmonious

B Choose the word from the chart in part A that best replaces the boldfaced words. Compare answers with a partner.

- Ryan and Tina work to keep their friendship **free of conflict**. *harmonious*
- Sometimes their opinions **are very different**, but they still get along.
- They work to make their friendship **valuable and constructive**.
- Having the same background helps them **understand and identify** with each other.
- Ryan and Tina **think very highly of** each other's accomplishments.
- Their friendship will certainly **last a long time**.

VOCABULARY PLUS see page 130

5 DISCUSSION

What should friends have in common?

A Look at the statements about friendship below. Do you agree with the statements? Add a statement of your own.

▶▶ PEOPLE ...	Agree	Disagree
1. who are close in age empathize with each other better.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. with similar social backgrounds have more harmonious friendships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. who have similar values and beliefs have stronger connections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. with similar personalities have the most enduring friendships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. benefit from having friends with the same educational background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. should only mingle with friends who have the same interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. from different cultures often clash with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B Group work Share your opinions and explain your reasons.

"The way I see it, people who are close in age can empathize better with each other. They share many of the same experiences and understand each other."

"I see your point, but I don't think age is that important. If people like doing similar things, they can be good friends."

C Group work How many people agreed or disagreed with each statement? Report your findings to the class.

"Three of us agreed that friends who are close in age empathize with each other better . . ."

Useful expressions

Disagreeing politely

- I see your point, but . . .
- I see what you mean, but . . .
- I'm not sure I agree.
- Do you think so?

1A Phrasal verbs

Additional phrasal verbs

Separable: call off, count out, cut off, get across, hand over, pass up, take back

Inseparable: go over, hang around, live up to, look after, pick on, run out of, touch on

Intransitive: catch on, come along, come over, fall apart, show up, turn out

Certain intransitive two-word phrasal verbs, when followed by a preposition, can then take an object.

back down (from)	cut back (on)	drop out (of)	give in (to)
catch up (to)	cut down (on)	get along (with)	give up (on)
check out (of)	drop in (on)	get away (with)	look back (on)

When confronted with an argument, Mark never **backs down**.

Mark never **backs down from** an argument.

- 1 Underline the phrasal verb in each sentence. Is the verb separable (S) or inseparable (I)? Is it transitive (T) or intransitive (NT)? Write the correct letters.

S, T 1. The referees called the soccer match off due to heavy rain.

___ 2. Jessica asked me to come over to her house for dinner.

___ 3. Sometimes I find it hard to live up to my parents' expectations.

___ 4. Sally insulted me yesterday, but today she took back her remark.

___ 5. When entertaining, there's nothing worse than running out of food at your party.

___ 6. When Jim gave me the chance to share his apartment, I couldn't pass up the opportunity.

- 2 Complete the sentences with intransitive phrasal verbs and a preposition from the grammar box. Be sure to use the correct form of the verb.

1. When my grandfather and I go jogging together, I sometimes need to stop and wait for him to catch up to me.

2. I didn't want to try bungee jumping, but I finally _____ the pressure from my friends and tried it. It was fun!

3. Even when you fail, a true friend will never _____ you.

4. My friends and I are trying to _____ the money we spend, so on Fridays we just watch TV at my house.

5. Mia's father is successful, even though he _____ college.

6. There's a long line of people waiting to _____ the hotel.

7. I insist on honesty; I won't let anyone _____ lying to me.

1A Adjectives and verbs to describe friendship

Use the verb or adjective form from each pair in the box to complete the conversations.

admire clash empathize endure harmonize
 admirable clashing empathetic enduring harmonious

- A: My dad has been friends with Ahmet since they were roommates in college, and they still get together once a month.

B: I really admire that! They must get along really well!
- A: Teresa listens to her friends when they have problems and makes a real effort to understand their feelings.

B: It sounds like she's _____. In my opinion, that's an admirable quality.
- A: Whenever I'm with Jake, we get into a fight about something ridiculous.

B: It's too bad you two always _____. Some friends bring out the worst in us.
- A: My parents get along really well. On the rare occasion they have an issue, they try to discuss it rationally and reach a fair compromise.

B: It's good they have a _____ relationship. They must be great role models.
- A: Some psychologists think that only people with similar personalities form strong, long-lasting friendships.

B: I'm not sure I agree. I can think of lots of people with different personalities who have _____ friendships. Look at us! We've been friends for over 20 years.

1B re- verbs

Use the correct form of five more verbs from the box to replace the underlined mistakes.

rebuild recall reconnect redefine rehash rekindle replace resurface

- Emil and Lydia attended the same school many years ago. Recently, they found each other on a social networking site and replaced their friendship. rekindled
- We hadn't seen Ian in class for days and were getting worried. He finally rehashed this morning and said he'd been called away to a family emergency. _____
- If I can't reconnect the last time I saw a friend, I can usually find that information by using the calendar function on my tablet. _____
- It's annoying when Jack resurfaces the same old arguments. He repeats the same points over and over again, hoping that we'll finally agree with him. _____
- Rachel and Yumi had a huge argument and stopped speaking to each other. Now, they've both apologized and are trying to recall their damaged friendship. _____
- Smartphones let us send texts and photos, locate friends, and update our status on social networking sites. They've rebuilt how we communicate. _____