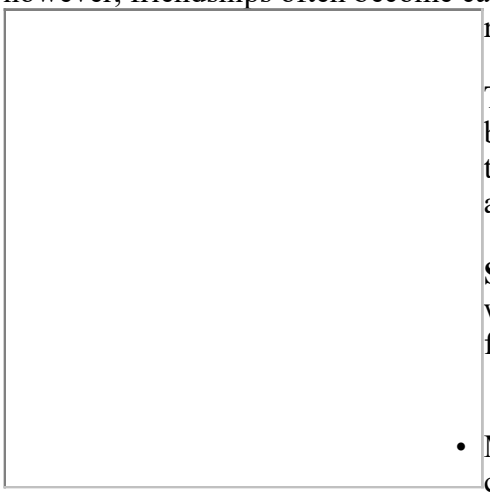
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Maintaining friendships on a busy schedule

Young people often maintain many friendships through high school and college. As we get older, however, friendships often become casualties in our battle to juggle demanding family and work responsibilities.



This can be a serious loss since strong friendships take time to build and play an important role in our emotional well-being. Try to view friendships as a priority and seek opportunities to maintain and nourish these vital relationships.

Schedule time for friendships. If taken for granted, friendships will eventually fade. Be sure to make time for the important friends in your life by:

- Marking friends' birthdays in your calendar and planning to celebrate together.
- Planning time in your schedule each week or month to get together with friends.
- Marking the dates in your calendar and try to keep the time open, but if you must cancel, immediately re-schedule another time.
- Be flexible with friends. If they are forced to cancel, don't take it personally.

Schedule activities together. Even the busiest schedule can make room for time with friends. If there is really no blank space on the day planner pages, try the following:

- If you are always short of time, consider joining up for essential activities. Do the grocery shopping together or help each other with house cleaning.
- Get together on the weekend for a giant cooking session. Make more and split it into freezer portions for both of you.
- Exercise together.
- Schedule haircuts or other appointments for the same time.
- Take your children to the park or for swimming lessons together.
- If you work close by, commute together or meet for a quick coffee before work.

Stay connected. Even when you can't be with friends in body, let them know you are still thinking of them.

- Send a quick email about a topic you're both interested in.
- Phone when you have five minutes to spare.

- Leave a cheery message on their answering machine, just to say hi.
- Send birthday cards and vacation postcards.

Plan special breaks. If a weekly or monthly visit isn't working, try making a real event of it.

- Make it a tradition to go away for a weekend together once a year. If a weekend is out of the question, plan an indulgent day at a spa.
- Plan ahead together—half the fun is in the preparation!

Be a friend in need. Never are friends more needed than in times of difficulty. Whether you see each other daily or yearly, be there when you are most needed.

- If a crisis occurs, make it a priority to be there for your friend.
- Avoid being judgmental. Listen and make it clear your support is always there.
- Offer practical help with the friend's children or home.
- Let friends in crisis know they can call on you any time.
- Keep your word. You would expect no less from your friend if you were in crisis.

Friendships are some of the most fulfilling relationships we will have in life. As it turns out, they are critical to our health and well-being as well as our enjoyment of life. Make time in any way possible to keep these critical connections alive.

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