

How to Keep Friends in Recovery

Many people believe that recovery from substance use means cutting ties with old friends and spending all your time with other people in recovery. Today, experts know that recovery is often more flexible than that. It is hard to avoid every situation where alcohol or drugs may be present. Instead, it is important to learn skills that help you stay on track with your goals.

When it comes to friendships, what matters most is being around people who make you feel safe, supported and respected.

Studies show that people with several strong support systems, such as friends, family members or peers, are more likely to do well in recovery. Those supports do not have to be people in recovery. What matters most is having healthy, supportive relationships.

Use this checklist to help decide if a friendship supports your recovery:

- Do I feel safe and accepted when I am with this person?
- Do they respect my choice not to use alcohol or drugs?
- Was our friendship mostly built around partying or using substances?
- Have they ever pushed me to use more than I wanted to?
- Can I count on them when I need help?
- Would they support my recovery goals if I were struggling?

If you cannot answer “yes” to most of these questions, that friendship may not be the best support for you right now. If you can answer “yes” to most of them, that person may be someone you want to keep close.

Spending time with friends who are not in recovery may require clear communication.

You can say things like:

- “I am focusing on my health and staying sober. Would you like to go for a walk or get coffee instead?”
- “I am not drinking right now, but I would still like to spend time together.”
- “Thanks for understanding. Your support means a lot to me.”

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It can also help to connect with people who are in recovery. They may understand some of your experiences in a unique way. Support groups, recovery meetings and online communities can be good places to meet others. You may want to explore 12-step programs, SMART Recovery or local sober groups.

Recovery does not mean being alone. It means choosing people who respect your choices, support your goals and help you succeed. Keep those people close.

#SupportSobriety #RealRecovery

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or addiction, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

Reviewed by Medical Director, Doctor of Medicine.

