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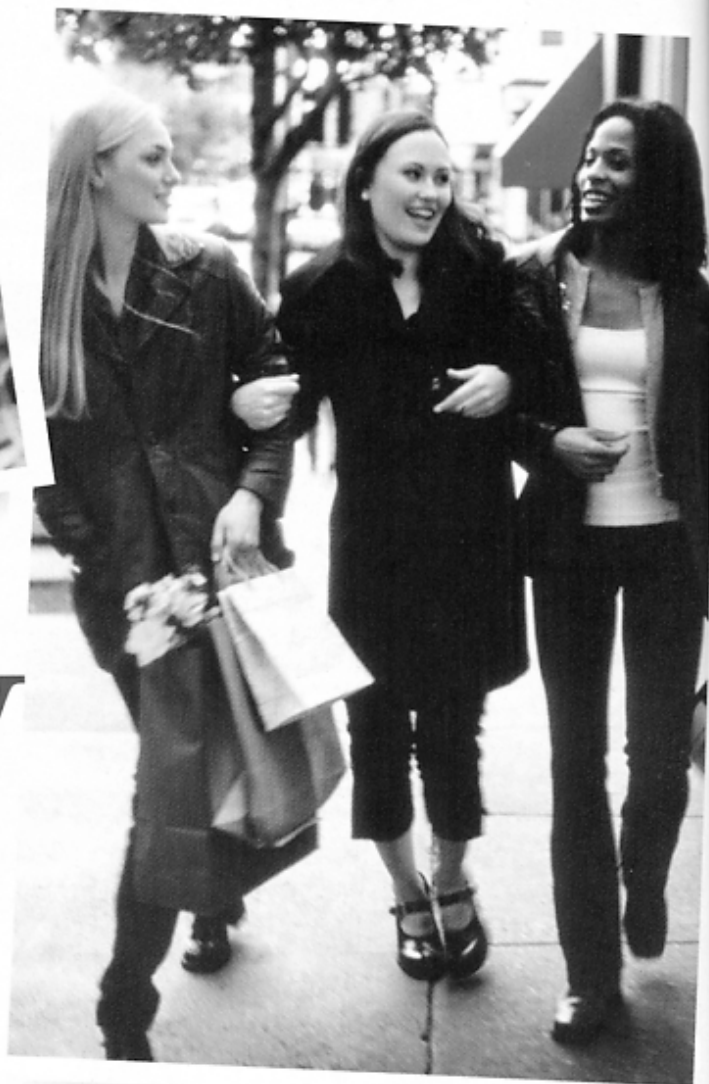
The best  
chocolate cake  
you've ever  
tasted, page 177



# the buddy system

**Juggling your job, kids and marriage can leave little time for friends. But here's why pals should be a priority.**

BY TERI CETTINA



After my second daughter was born, I did a mini life review, noting what I was grateful for and what I felt was lacking. The top entry on my wish list: more close friends.

Sure, I had acquaintances, but I had only three really close friends, and even those friendships had become tenuous. One friend had moved, one was busy with her family, and one had withdrawn while battling infertility.

When I told my husband I was lonely, he teased me. "You're never going to have friends like you did in high school,

when you shared secrets and had sleepovers," he said. "You're an adult now."

Was he right?

I often compare myself to my mother, who died a few years ago. She always seemed to be meeting a girlfriend for lunch. For more than 30 years, the members of her bridge club met every month. How did they stay so connected? Fewer life transitions. My mother and her friends all married at around the same time, had children at the same time, stayed married and lived in the same town for decades. Their lives were

stable, and so were their friendships. Women's lives are different today. When we move to a new town, change jobs, marry or divorce, become stay-at-home moms or return to work, we risk losing friends in the process.

But it is not a cost we should willingly pay. If anything, research suggests that as our lives become more complex, we need close friendships even more. In one 2002 study, researchers at UCLA found that the "fight or flight" reaction may not be the only two human responses to stress. It seems that stress



can also trigger a "tend and befriend" response in women—an impulse to draw close to other women. The researchers theorize that this instinct may have helped females and their young to survive in early human societies. Today it may be what drives our desire to connect with friends when we need comfort.

"Our women friends understand us, nurture us and sometimes give us a much-needed kick in the butt," says Kristen Harrington, a psychotherapist in Kingston, New York. "I tell my women clients, 'Not only do you have a right to carve out time for friends. You really need to do it.'"

If you've lost touch with old friends and yearn to make new ones, here are some ways to go about it.

**1 GET SERIOUS.** Approach the task the way you would any other important goal. "We need to put intention behind our desire to cultivate new friends," says life coach Cheryl Richardson of Newburyport, Massachusetts. "It's O.K. for the effort to be conscious. There's nothing wrong with that."

**2 INTERVIEW YOURSELF.** Ask yourself some questions to help focus your search: What's the most important thing in your life right now? What values, interests or hobbies would you like a new friend to share? "Your answers will provide clues to where you might want to go to meet people," says Richardson, author of *Take Time for Your Life* (Broadway Books).

**3 PURSUE A PASSION.** If you recently moved to your area, consider forming a newcomers' group. If

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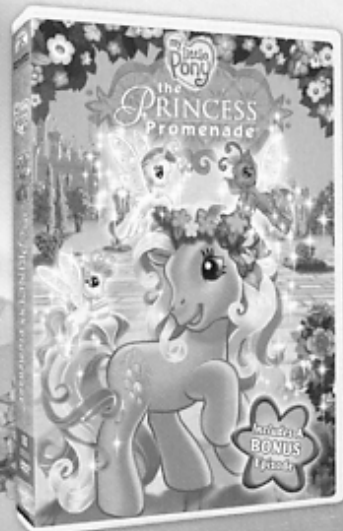
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you love to read, start a book group. "Joining a club or taking a class is a natural way to get to know people," says Raeleen D'Agostino Mautner, Ph.D., a cognitive psychologist in New Haven, Connecticut. "It makes finding new friends a secondary mission instead of your primary focus. Friends become something you're looking for while doing something you enjoy."

**4 TAKE A CHANCE.** If you seem to connect with a woman in your yoga class, make a casual overture. Say, "It's been fun chatting with you, and I'd love to hear more about the other classes you've taken. Do you have time for coffee?" Don't let shyness stop you. "Trust me," says Richardson. "Ninety-five percent of the people you're drawn to will be just as interested in getting friendlier with you."

**5 DON'T BLURT OUT TOO MUCH.** If a new acquaintance shares some personal information over coffee, do the same, says Dr. Mautner, but don't launch into your entire life story. Take it slow. "Sharing too much can come across as desperation, and no one wants a needy new friend."

**6 BE THOUGHTFUL.** If you read an article a new acquaintance might find interesting, mail it to her. If you hear about an upcoming lecture she might enjoy, tell her. These gestures are a lovely way to keep in touch.

**7 MAKE A DATE.** Friendships need uninterrupted time and attention, which you can't give if you're cooking or answering e-mails while talking on the phone to a friend. Richardson recommends regular girls' nights out and, as friendships deepen, planning girlfriend weekends. "My best friend lives several hours away," she says, "so whenever we get together, we have a sleepover. It's the best."

Contrary to my husband's belief, I've decided that Richardson is right: Women friends are never too old for slumber parties. So I've arranged to spend a weekend with my old friend Laura, who now lives in another state. Yes, I want to make new friends, but I also want to keep the ones I have. I'll take my younger daughter along. During the day Laura and I will do things with our kids. But after they're asleep, we'll put on pajamas, sip tea and catch up on each other's lives. I can't wait! ■

## Friendship Etiquette

**PROBLEM:** You and a friend have drifted apart and you'd like to get close again.

**SOLUTION:** Send her an e-mail or note saying you miss her. If the friendship broke off because of something you did, apologize. If you're not sure why you drifted apart, say so. Tell her you think of her often and would like to talk. If she's interested, she'll respond. If she doesn't, be patient. She may be going through a rough time and may get back in touch when things ease up.

**PROBLEM:** You'd like to end a friendship but feel guilty about it.

**SOLUTION:** Don't feel guilty, says Dr. Mautner, author of *Living La Dolce Vita* (Source Books). "When we drop unsuitable friends, we can put more energy into the friendships that matter." The easiest way to try to end things is to become unavailable and hope your friend gets the message. The kinder but harder thing to do is to sit down with her or write her a note and tell her the truth. Harrington suggests using a three-step approach:

1. Say something positive about her or your friendship.
2. Explain why you feel you must end it, using "I statements" only: "Now that I'm married, I'm not interested in going out partying."
3. End by wishing her well.

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