

- Friendship

## Best of friends

Strong friendships give women an outlet to share their problems, thoughts, feelings and triumphs, and help when setbacks arrive. By

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FEMALE friendships often involve a deep and meaningful connection, with women frequently coming together to support one another through major life milestones and challenging moments.



Here Dr Vanessa Pilkington, a Doctify-rated psychologist, explores what brings women together and the many physical and mental benefits strong female friendships offer.

Provides emotional support

“Female friendships often involve listening, reflecting, supporting, understanding and giving empathy,” reflects Dr Pilkington.

“There’s this sort of unspoken rule that ‘we’ll go for a coffee and I’ll listen to your problems for half an hour, and then you’ll listen to mine’.

“Whereas, I think with men this emotional support tends to be to activities. They will often meet up to do a competitive sport, and then might have a catchup afterwards, but are probably less likely to delve straight into talking about their problems.

“I think women tend to have deeper conversations about the way they feel and what’s going on in their lives,” says Dr Pilkington.

Strong supportive friendships can have huge benefits for your mental health Psychologist Dr Vanessa Pilkington

Helps women bounce back quicker from setbacks

“Women often have a strong emotional and social support network which enables them to bounce back from setbacks more quickly,” says the psychologist. “That sense of emotional belonging is particularly protective during challenging times as it gives them an extra level of support.

“When people experience profound change, or what can feel like elements of loss, it can be a lonely, isolating time – and I think women are more likely to come together during these times.”

Boosts mental health

“Strong supportive friendships can have huge benefits for your mental health,” says Dr Pilkington.

“For example, if someone is struggling with anxiety, they might feel much safer and more secure with a friend. In addition, you’re less likely to suffer depression if you have good emotional support and strong supportive relationships.”

#### Boosts health

“Having a strong supportive network of friends is a protective factor for our health, as it can help lower inflammation and reduce cortisol levels,” says Dr Pilkington. “People are much more likely to get ill if their stress levels, inflammation levels and cortisol levels are high.”

#### Boosts confidence and self-esteem

“Women tend to be good at noticing small things and will often compliment each other’s clothes, hair, make-up etc,” says Dr Pilkington.

“Positive feedback from other people makes you feel good about yourself.”

Here are some tips on how to nurture these friendships... Be inclusive

“Remember to be inclusive and to

invite everyone to things that are going on,” says Dr Pilkington.

#### Pick up the phone

“It’s always good to be honest and clear with your friends when you feel hurt,” says Dr Pilkington.

“I would recommend picking up the phone to talk to them about it and to express how you feel. You often don’t get the tone of the voice across when communicating via text or email.”

#### Show up for people

“Try to show up for your friends, whether it’s their birthday, wedding or a different special occasion,” recommends Dr Pilkington.

#### Respect their space

“Respect that other people aren’t always going to be available,” says the psychologist.