

# FRIENDSHIP PERSONALITY TEST

## THE COMPANION GUIDE V.0.2

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ABSTRACT. This is the companion guide to the friendship personality test put out on [www.practicalfriendship.com](http://www.practicalfriendship.com). It is work in progress and the current version v.0.2 was published on March 16, 2020. If interested in this topic please feel free to check back on the website in the future.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Friendship Personality test is designed to find the focus of what is important in the friendship relationship between two people when viewed from one side. Despite being psychometric in design, it is not meant to generate abstract numbers and literally measure the quality of the friendship as in whether it is 'good enough' or whether 'I am getting enough. Instead it is meant to establish the core aspects why the friendship is meaningful per se to the other person.

It is a tool to establish why I am grateful that my friend has chosen to be my friend. Why this person makes me a better person than I would be without her or him. And why I should maybe pay a bit attention to ensure I also invest a little time every now and then into this relationship.

Likewise often people ask how they can be a good friend, or a better friend. I believe asking this question is already a good step in the right direction. It is however true that some roles come naturally to us whereas others might be not so easy. Thus one person can listen very well and show empathy to other peoples feelings, allowing them to deeply understand them and helping them in discussing their life's problems. Others might not be quite so deep, but always have a great joke on their lips, allowing their friends to relax in their company. All these different aspects are needed in a normal persons life. Some people might be lucky in that they find a number of these already wonderfully covered by their life partner, but even then it is a bad idea to place the burden to cover for all social needs on that person.

The questionnaire is thus designed to evaluate how one friend supports another friends through the relationship, and can be filled out as a rough cut self assessment (What things do I do for or with my friend X) or as a friend-type assessment (What things does my friend X do for or with me).

### 2. THE TEST

The test in the current version comes with 105 Likert questions that are used to estimate 36 characteristics. Later versions will be intended to reduce this to about 50 questions, but at the current level there is not yet sufficient data to reduce the number of question based on scientific criteria.

Given tests the first run takes about 10 min when answering questions about a friend and 12-20 min when asking these questions about yourself from the perspective of a few friends or a single friend. Subsequent runs reduce to 6 min answering for a friend and 8-12 min when answering the questions about yourself from the perspective of a different set of friends.

At the end the characteristics are calculated and displayed. Subsequently from this a score for each of the 20 different friendship types is also calculated, to give a rank order for the most meaningful roles.

### 3. THE INVENTORY

The Friendship Inventory published on [www.practicalfriendship.com](http://www.practicalfriendship.com) is designed to record the results of the Friendship Personality Test. It has three parts, a section to record the results for oneself, one's key strengths, relationship attitudes and activity preferences. Secondly a section to give an overview of the individual friendship needs or roles and who in the circle is currently meeting them (or where there currently is a gap). Thirdly the outward look, listing the key friends and recording which friendship role oneself assumes towards them in order to meet their key needs according to one's own natural capabilities and dispositions.

The goal of this inventory is **not** to measure 'am I getting enough from my friends'. Indeed asking yourself such a question is a sure way to deteriorate existing and future friendships. Given our cognitive bias on the relative importance of our actions we are unlikely to ever accurately measure them. The inventory instead is intended to answer two questions (subsequent adjustments included):

- What current needs of my friends am I well enabled to cater for? What do I know that they appreciate me for? And - possibly - what other role could I also assume with a little bit of an attitude change of mine ?
- And what support of and interaction with my friends am I grateful for ? In what way are they meaningful in my life ? How do they help me become a better person or literally just make my life a little better ?

If forced to summarize it into a really short phrase, I believe it would be '**Service and Gratitude**'.

### 4. THE PERSONALITY TRAITS

This section is inspired by the VIA Character Strengths of Seligman (2004). A range of positive character traits describe from what pool of strengths you provide meaningful assistance to your friends. Further sources are Lee and Lee (2009) and Lee and Ashton (2004).

**Patience, peace and calmness:** People that radiate internal peace make it possible for other people to relax and calm in their presence. They can be the rock in emotional turmoil.

**Positivity, hope and seeing the good:** Positivity is seeing the good in people and situations and making others around you see and feel it too.

**Proactiveness and Consideration:** This trait implies perceiving your friends needs and being willing to actively meet it, both at smaller and larger physical, emotional, financial or time cost to yourself.

**Humility and interest in others:** Taking a genuine interest in others and in particular your friends first. This is not being jealous but being quietly happy at their good fortunes and happiness.<sup>1</sup>

**Social Ease, agreeableness and connectibility:** This is 'being good with people', making them comfortable to relax, integrating them, being able to do the small talk and taking the initiative to it.

**Fun and humour:** Being able to make people laugh is a great trait. Laughter is good for us all and bringing it out in people is a wonderful capability

**Energy, determination, agency and organization:** Having energy is a resource, applying it in the context of your friends is a trait. For most experiences

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Lewis (1952) on the effect of pride in friendships

that determine our good friendships someone took the initiative and made us do that hike, that trip, engage in that project or volunteer action, and inspired us or cajoled us into it with his sheer determination to do it and involve us too.

**Honesty, Authenticity and Integrity:** We instinctively all know it when we see it in people. That sincerity, that 'this is genuinely me' aura honest and authentic people have about them. The feeling that our words will be safe with them. The feeling that there is no 2nd person hiding in there, behind the mask, but that word and thought are congruent.

**Reliability, consistency and persistence:** While sometimes surprises are good, it is good to have a stable element in our life. Reliable and consistent friends who are with us and don't just change their behaviour on a whim, but who will show up if they said they would, are sure not to drop of the radar but to maintain a stable affection for us is one of those key elements in life to give us comfort and stability.

**Acceptance, Tolerance and Flexibility:** The capability to separate between action and person. The affirmation of the other as a person and being undogmatic about aspects of disagreement.

**Kindness, Warmth and Love:** This is the love and affection shown both spontaneously as well as over longer times. It is the warm hug, the caring smile, the meal prepared for us, the card sent to wish us well or a speedy recovery, all these are signs that the person genuinely cares for us from the bottom of her/his heart.

**Intelligence, Curiosity and Knowledge:** This trait is an enabler of good discussions, that are stimulating. The variety of topics, interest and the quality of arguments are all driven by an acute and alive intellect. The love of learning and teaching enables great interactions that are by design memory building for friends too.

## 5. THE RELATIONSHIP ATTITUDES

**Benevolence, Wanting Success and Wellbeing:** Wishing your friend well and being interested in their wellbeing is the defining element of friendship.

**Consideration and prioritisation of friends needs:** This is taking your friends needs into account, potentially taking one for the team. Not chatting to that pretty girl or handsome boy because you know your friend has a crush on him/her, recommending a friend for a job even though you might have liked it yourself, going to the cinema even though you might have preferred the theatre etc., or actively coming to your friends help at financial, emotional or time cost to yourself.

**Pride in your friends:** Pride in your friends gives them confidence. It is affirming them, publicly stating that you approve of their character and support them.

**Trust and Confidentiality:** Keeping secret or confidential stories or items just that - confidential.

**Loyalty, Time and History shared:** This is the hoard of history, joined stories and experiences that both of you treasure and value.

**Mutual Belief and Cultural Background:** Having the same beliefs or cultural background offers a common ground from which to build trust and closeness.

**Relationship-value and Forgiveness:** This is about really appreciating the relationship that has built up, and communicating it. It is also the active interest in maintaining it, and includes the act of forgiveness in order to salvage it in crisis.

**Mutual Interest:** Mutual interest binding together friends also is a classic theme. Interests and life goals, fascination for sports, political or social causes (with the actual intent to do something about it), all leading to a range of joined activities.

**Mutual Understanding:** This is the capability of understanding the other and the feeling of being understood on a deep level. It enables the state of quality time, that Chapman (2009) writes about in quality time.

**Feeling Needed and Reciprocity:** A friendship being one of equals is a recurring theme in literature, and this means that both friends are both giving and receiving, though there might be differences in timing and kind. But imbalanced relationships usually end up breeding resentment over time.

**Openness and Vulnerability:** This is another one of the key enablers, as friendship is an authentic relationship from person to person, thus requiring friends to be open with each other. Again, in particular in male friendships, this attitude will only grow in time in tandem with trust.

**Love, Affection and directed Gratitude:** Whilst love and affection are usually mentioned in romantic love, great expressions have throughout the ages been used in classical nonromantic friendships both between men and women. Recognising the pure love and affection a friend holds for you is greatly affirming and friendship enhancing.

**Enjoyment:** Be it because of the fun and laughter, the positive energy, the interesting discussion or the warmth experience, a key theme is that friends again and again come together is because they experience thorough joy in their encounter making them want to continue meeting.

## 6. THE ACTIVITY PREFERENCES

**Dirt time and Hanging Out:** This is the pure spending time in each others company. It doesn't so much matter what you do, or how you do it, but that you spend the time together and thus build up a greater familiarity. Eating together, hanging out, drinking, taking walks, anything really as long as you are in each others company.

**Work together or pursue common goal or interest:** Here the unifying element is the common goal or task. This builds acquaintance as you learn to appreciate the others approaches, energy, thinking. There is also a companionship element and bonding, as you work towards the goal. Some writers on friendship define this as the core element of 'male friendship'.

**Deep Listening and Allowing Expression of Self:** This is the activity of one side opening up and the other one being deeply attentive in order to enable it. Depending on the needs of the situation this can be one-sided (in a crisis) or interactive (general sharing encounter), and over time builds a deep understanding towards each other. Some writers on friendship define this as the core element of 'female friendship'.

**Encouragement and Challenge:** This is about our friends seeing the best in us but holding us accountable to achieve it. This is both stick and carrot, cajoling our friends to push towards their goals, and challenge them whether they are doing enough, as well as helping them to keep up the spirit in difficult situations.

**Expansion and Discovery:** This is the joined activity of exploring - both physically out into the world, museums and new places, as well as mentally to new topics, theories and experiences, satisfying our mutual curiosity.

**Guidance and Giving Direction:** Helping a friend make sense of a situation, talking through the pros and cons, asking questions that helps him/her structure and get perspective as well as using our own experience and insight to support the decision process is helpful and meaningful for our friends wellbeing.

**Practical Help:** This activity is the classical baby sitting or helping out with homework. Meeting our friends practical need by our investment of time and effort to their benefit. Knowing you repeatedly are there to support and get your hands dirty is a powerful display of valuation and appreciation.

**Being there and Spending time to help you in difficult times:** This activity is being there when your friend needs you, be it at the funeral of another person, for venting after a romantic breakup or coming to the hospital. No advice, no practical help, no deep listening, just being there and showing you have your friends back.

**Advocacy and Vocal Support:** Having your friends back vocally, affirming that you have his back even when they are being criticised by others or when the going gets tough, introducing them to other people in your network and commenting positively in their presence and absence.

**Effect Change:** Having your friends back vocally, affirming that you have his back even when they are being criticised by others or when the going gets tough, introducing them to other people in your network and commenting positively in their presence and absence.

**Generosity and Making Gifts:** Whilst in our over affluent society gifts are a little out of fashion, well placed and thoughtful gifts have historically been a key ritual and habit between people to build connection. Not by accident is this one of Chapman's key love languages and arguably a bit of a lost art.

**Teaching and Learning:** Both teaching and learning from each other is a deeply memory building experience as you invest in each others growth. It often occurs in tandem in working on a joined goal or passion, but also conveys caring.

**Embedding and Circle bonding:** This is about embedding the pairwise friendship in a group, of three, four or five people, each of whom complementing each other, enhancing each others jokes, insights, listening and understanding capabilities and advice giving. So even if one person becomes quiet or stressed, the friendship is maintained in the embedding in the circle of friends.

## 7. THE FRIENDSHIP TYPES

Combination of these character traits, relationship attitudes and activity preferences combine to different friendship roles. The first professional typology, and to date far the best out there is that of Rath (2006), which is coincidentally a great book to read. He does however focus very much on the key functions, which he calls 'vital' friends, giving in my view not enough credit to the wider circle. In friendship literature one item is frequently referred to and those are the Dunbar Numbers. Sutcliffe et al. (2012) refer to this as the 'support clique' of 4-5 and the sympathy group of '12-15'. It is estimated that we historically approximately spend 40 pc of our time with the support clique and another 20 pc with the sympathy group.<sup>2</sup> Thus I kept to this clustering and used it to distinguish between the key support group (the 'company of heroes') and the wider social circle.

For the following section please note that this typology resulted from an iterative process between looking at the literature (books, internet, ...) and finding new aspects and nuances represented by a variety of statements about (good, best, close) friends, as a result of which the categories of personality traits, relationship attitudes and activities were refined, and maintaining a developing list of types which was mapped onto the parallel developing category list.

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<sup>2</sup>Until Facebook came along and made us spend all our time online with the 150 and much less with the key 5...

## 8. THE ESSENTIALS - MY COMPANY OF HEROES

These are the best and very close friends who we do (or possibly should) spend a lot of time with. If you are lucky within your core group of friends at least one exhibits this type in order to make your life just great overall.

**Best friend:** The friend from old times, who understands your history, and has been through the thick with you, loyal to the end. Supportive when you are in a pickle, and the one to stay with you when the others don't.

**Coach:** This is the one who pushes you forward. He knows your goals, and he knows when you need a reminder not to lose focus. And when the going gets tough, he will be there by the side lines cheering you on or pushing from behind.

**Partner in Crime:** This is the soulmate, the one with the passionate same goal. This is the Steve Jobs, the two great minds coming together to solve the mysteries of mathematics or physics, the inklings composing their books together and reviewing them. In a way this one comes closest to the friendship of old, where a joined passion for a common goal and the power of appreciation for it creates the friendship almost by itself.

**Clown:** This is the fun one. Always producing a light giggle or roaring laughter in his company the clown brings joy all around. We all need a Ms. Doubtfire in our life, our own personal Robin Williams. This is the one who teaches our kids to play pranks on us on April 1st, who sends us stupid memes on a dreary day, and every now and then tests our capacity to forgive if a joke overstepped the mark a little.

**Mind Opener:** This is the one who you get on well enough to enjoy the conversation with, but is different enough to add that random element to your life. This could be the hippie leftie who eats vegan but still talks to the carnivore in you, or the artist or musician who is free of constraints of a daily life defined by the struggles of family or regular work spending his time with the creation of inventive works of art.

**Mentor:** This is the friend who provides perspective and wise council before big decisions and along the way. She should know the person well, has empathy and life experience.

**Mom:** The mom radiates warmth, love and affection. It is the safe house where you rock up, to find a full fridge, open arms and a warm hug, sweets and cake, and a patient ear to listen to your heart's sorrows.

**Dad:** This is the second version of the home coming. Quiet and caring, no big words, maybe just a 'good to have you back' nod. This function can be the one into which the actual dad and/or uncle morph into, as a person grows up, moves out and becomes independent.

## 9. THE SOCIAL CIRCLE

This is the sympathy group. Some of them may be deep connections too, but essentially not every friendship needs to be of the 'put down your life for each other'-type. In life it is the good friends, close but not super close that help us out in key moments both practically as well as help us simply have a good time.

**Cheerleader:** This is the one to show up at our sports events, concerts, speeches or other events, whilst also behind our back be singing our praises and holding down the fort for us.

**Rust Friend:** This is the old friend from school or general earlier days. You are acquainted, trust each other, and generally enjoy each others company, but for now there is no pressure or desire to significantly increase the frequency of encounters.

**Connector:** The connector just knows everyone. He effortlessly connects to people around him, remembering the stories and introducing people. He knows peoples needs and capabilities, and matches them as he can.

**Daredevil:** This is the power type, hiking, going on adventurous holidays, and prompting us to actually do the things we always dreamed of, but never thought we would do. She brings us to go-carting, makes us do Cross-Fit, laughs away our protests and complaints but then basks in our expression of joy and fun, as we in the evening sit with her over a pint confessing that it was a great day out with her.

**Neighbour:** The neighbour is a classic, once domestic life settles in. This is the mutual support group for little favours, such as checking in on the house when you are on holiday. Coming over for a bottle of wine, a few beers or a dinner is enjoyable, and you encounter each other at various local social occasions. A very frequent variant is someone to meet in parents evenings, where the kids go to play, and who is likewise living close enough to support with day to day items (especially those of the kids) if life overwhelms you.

**Younger Sister/Brother:** This does not refer to kinship, but to the phenomenon that sometimes friendships can be struck across generations. An older guy/lady befriends a younger person who profits from their experience in life and in return draws them back into 'active life'.

**Saint and Idol:** This is the one we wish we would be like (at least a little more). Whatever you admire in live, she embodies it. Truthful, authentic, despite rough adversity still smiling and positive. Compassionate and putting other people first when we ourselves would have withdrawn or minded our business, the saint reminds us to appeal to our better senses and keep pushing forward with hope, love and integrity.

**Work Pal:** This is the one to make you want to go to work. She may provide you with a little funny gossip, or help you out with a task. He may just make some funny jokes here and there and brighten up your day. In meetings she has your back, and he shows appreciation of the work you do. After hours on a friday a pint in the pub might let off some steam. Before important decisions or presentations she has an open ear to give you some perspective on the matters at hand, using her knowledge of the work place to point out issues you have missed.

**Discussant:** The discussion partner is someone with similar interests, who has an appreciation for the finer details of issues you are also interested in, be it poetry, politics, philosophy, art, music or contemporary events. It is fun to engage with the person and delve deeper, knowing that your passion is understood and mirrored.

**Best Friends Partner:** As the Friendship grows he/she also becomes a friend in their own right and adopts one of the pure roles. Often in career oriented couples even with the best intentions one partner becomes a little amnesic of the old friends and the need for friendship, and the social partner picks up the slack, prompting to reinitiate contact, reminding of birthdays and other social occasions. The partner is aware of the deep importance of the friendships and out of love for the other partner ensures that they don't wither.

**Single Friend:** This is the one who never settled, challenging us to go out and relive our glory days. The one who allows us to experience the troubles of single life by telling us all the stories of why it didn't work out this time. She gives us perspective on also the benefits of our current life.

**Running Mate:**The relationship is not deep, but you are there for each other, ensuring that the other's training schedule does not slack. Whether it is 6am in the parks for a jog, after work in the gym or on the weekend of the golf course, you keep to your schedule together.

## 10. CONCLUSION

This is a reasonable framework to analytically categorise friendships and in particular friendship activities within the larger project 'Maintaining Friendships in Midlife'. At the point of this writing (March 16, 2020) this document is just a proposition for discussion and testing to be developed over the course of 2020. Please feel free to contact me with suggestions and comments. What I am in particular looking for are further good questions / statements exemplifying the above categories. I do hope that the friendship-type-test as well as the inventory together however already prove useful, even though they are still fairly technologically rudimentary.

Many thanks,  
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