

Keeping Connected.....

by Minx Boren, MCC

The importance of cultivating
friendship in a busy world



Do you know that women thrive and discover themselves, as well as each other, through their connections and friendships? Instinctively, as women, we cannot help but be well aware of this. But often, we find ourselves wondering how to avoid growing apart from the friends we hold dear. Yet, here we are in our overly busy lives, in a time of greater than average stress because of the financial and political climate we live in, when there seems to be less time and opportunity for meaningful connections.

"Tend and befriend" is the phrase used to describe a woman's inclination to gather with other women for comfort and support when the going gets tough. Unlike men, whose testosterone driven brains react with instincts of "fight or flight," as women we respond to stress with a flood of brain chemicals, including oxytocin, which calms us and countermands "fight or flight." We are physiologically encouraged to both gather the children and seek out, develop and maintain friendships. The big bonus is that as we do so even more oxytocin is released, further supporting this calming effect and, therefore, further easing the stress. The clincher is that estrogen seems to fortify the effect of oxytocin, while testosterone reduces it.

There is also research to back up our inklings and knowings. A study at UCLA* suggests that not only are women relational by nature, but that our friendships may be a potent antidote to stress. Multiple studies also show that social ties reduce our risk of disease by lowering blood pressure, heart rate and cholesterol. The Nurses' Health Study from Harvard Medical School found that there is a direct correlation between more friendships and fewer physical impairments due to aging. The nurses were also more likely to feel that they were leading joyful lives. Given these stressful times, doesn't it make good sense for us to seek more ways to tend and befriend one another?

The trend these days is also toward shallower roots, as we move from city to city—whether permanently, or because our jobs keep us flying from here to there—pursuing opportunities. In today's more mobile world, family and friends are often scat-

tered in all directions making it even more challenging to stay involved and connected. Modern day links frequently involve telephones and electronic correspondence with only occasional face-to-face opportunities to reach out and touch someone, to nurture old friendships or to build new ones. While social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter offer avenues of convenience for connection, it's not enough!

So what's a gal to do to avoid losing her relationships and friendships? Here are five quick and easy suggestions to combat every day challenges and nurture the friendships you hold dear.

✓ **Schedule tea for two every week and meet either in person or by phone for a deeply connective half an hour.**

✓ **Invite a few best friends to an old fashioned PJ party. If necessary, chip in and hire a baby sitter to take care of the kids (at a PJ party of their own).**

✓ **Make time for a walk or talk with a buddy each week.**

✓ **Great exercise with great company, what could be better?**

✓ **Search our opportunities and networking events to connect with large groups of like-minded women.**

✓ **Make an effort to celebrate your friends milestones and achievements. Support is the best form of friendship.**

With a little effort and some creative time management, you can stay connected in this 24/7, "on the go" time we live in. ✓

*Taylor, S. E., Klein, L.C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A. R., & Updegraff, J. A. Female Responses to Stress: Tend and Befriend, Not Fight or Flight

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