

# The Healing Power of Girlfriends

## How to Create Your Best Life Through Female Connection

Deborah Olson

BOOK EXCERPT

The concept of friendship exists as a unique paradigm, distinct from other relationships we participate in during our lifetime. In this relationship, the connection is not formed through the bonds of marriage or blood relation. That said, a mother-daughter or sister-sister bond will often operate much like a female friendship. However, one of the hallmark features of friendship is that we share the bond on the premise that we are willing to both give and receive with each other—not out of duty, but because we choose to be in the relationship. This creates a reciprocal quality to the relationship that makes it distinct and sets it apart from spousal or familial relationships.

The definitions of “friendship” vary, but there are many common traits that remain constant and similar themes in what people look for and expect from someone they consider a friend. GoodTherapy.org defines friendship as “a close association between two people marked by feelings of care, respect, admiration, concern, love, or like.” Much has been written over the years about the concept of friendship. Aristotle said, “True friendship is lasting because it is grounded in good.” This quote perfectly highlights what is at the core of an authentic friendship. The foundational building blocks of a true friendship are comprised of a solid, shared commitment to the betterment of the other. It is this core connection that defines and shapes the relationship and creates an environment of safety, authenticity, and vulnerability.

There are many different levels of friendships, and as such, the depth of the relationship varies as well. We tend to show more vulnerability with those friendships in which we feel safe and accepted. In more superficial relationships, we often share only a small portion of ourselves as a way of protecting our hearts.

Our friendships are as individual as the people who are in them. I consider myself very blessed to have many girlfriends, and the relationship I have with each one is special and

unique. There are many factors that come into play with these friendships, which gives each relationship its distinctive flavor and individual quality. My Ya-Ya friendships are a perfect example to illustrate this point.

Beth brings a warm and caring heart to the table of friendship. She loves to help people and make a difference. For many years, Beth provided highly-skilled and loving care as an RN in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), and so we share that nursing connection, wanting to heal those in need. If you ever need a favor, Beth is there, and she will give you the shirt off her back to help out. Beth's compassion for others is a core part of who she is as a nurse and as a friend!

Jody possesses a high-energy and vibrant passion for family, friends, and living a healthy lifestyle, and she has a love for nature. When our kids were young, she hosted some amazing family parties for all of us at her country home near Milwaukee. Jody brings many special assets to our Ya-Ya friendship, including strength, resilience, empowerment, and a "can do" approach to life. You feel all of those traits when you are in her presence, and they do rub off on you! She has a dedication and loyalty to her close friends that is evidenced by her unconditional love for all of us Ya-Ya sisters.

Kathy adds a sweet breath of fresh air, imbued with a fun sense of humor, that keeps all of us from taking life or ourselves too seriously. She is for sure the least intense of the four of us, and thus adds some levity and lightheartedness to our friendship table. Her heart for others is huge, kind, and loving. When life's curveballs start getting tossed your direction, you know she will always be there for you, no matter what! Kathy brings a special quality of thoughtfulness to our group, and often one of us will find a note of encouragement from her in the mailbox on a day when we need it most.

I cherish each relationship with my gal pals and celebrate each one for the special part it plays in my life journey. In Chapter 3, much more will be shared on the different levels of friendships and how they give structure and definition to the types of relationships we participate in with our girlfriends.

Over the years, I have offered many workshops, seminars, and weekend retreats for women on a variety of topics. Recently I have been speaking on friendships and asking women

what they seek in a friendship. I've found that women generally want similar things in their girlfriend relationships.

I ask these women the question, "What are your expectations in female friendships with your girlfriends?" This opens up a plethora of conversations and ideas on the qualities women are looking for and value in their friendships. There are common themes in their answers, such as loyalty, honesty, connecting on a soul level, mutual respect, acceptance, availability to spend time together, and holding the same values and ideals, to name a few. It makes sense that as we go through different life stages and chapters, our priorities change as well, and what we emphasize or value in a friendship may shift. However, as I have worked with many different women through the years who are at various stages of life, I have seen several unifying threads in what they continue to value and seek in friendships.