

Shy or afraid of rejection, most of us are cautious about initiating new friendships. It's safer to wait for the other woman to call us. But what if she's waiting, too? We need to put our fear of rejection aside and start taking risks by pulling out those phone numbers we've collected and making that first phone call to invite someone to join us for dinner.

The first step in establishing and maintaining a good relationship with a friend is to have one with ourselves. If we are comfortable with who we are, we are more appealing to others.

It is more important to be interested than interesting. An e-mail that has been going around says quite aptly, "others may not remember exactly what you did or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel." Often friends just need to vent, so we need to sharpen our listening skills. And never pass up an opportunity to say a kind word. Being kind is more important than being right. I know someone who keeps a notebook of her friends' birthdays, favorite colors, things they collect, etc. She remembers to call if someone is taking a test and to inquire after an ailing parent. She might pick up a trinket because she knows her friend will love it. These are small gestures, but they go a long way toward making a person feel appreciated and loved.

As one woman said, "If I had to choose between my dearest friend and my current lover, my friend would win hands down. A best friend is forever." ■