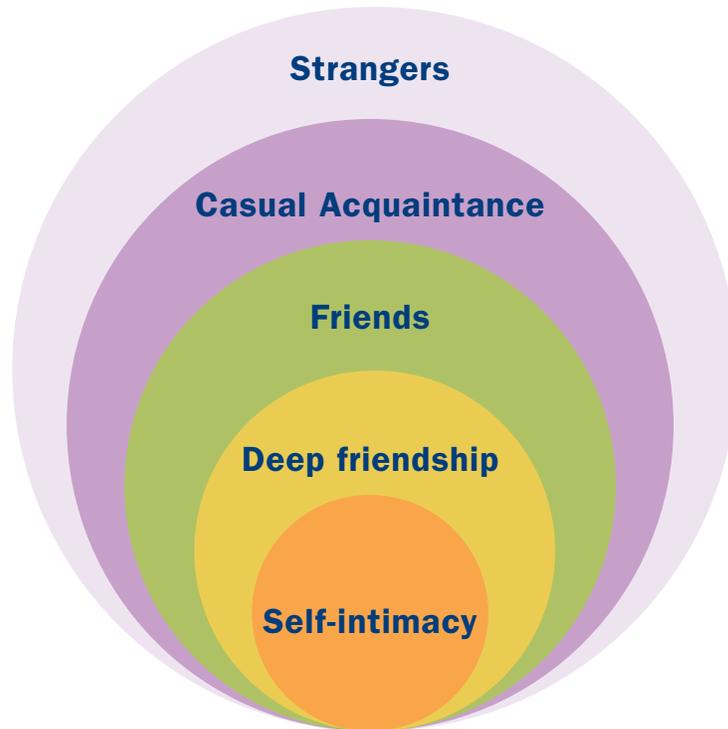


The 5 Stages of Friendship



#5 Strangers

Strangers are people you begin to share information with on a superficial level. This might be someone you greet in the “hallway” at work or school. A stranger might be someone who “makes” eye contact with you on the bus, or someone who has been introduced to you for the first time by another person. You would begin to speak to a stranger in general terms that reveals very little, if any personal information. Topics might be the weather, current events, or what town or city they live in. If you both respond positively to the “initial” conversation, you might consider participating in some activities that stranger might do. If things go well, you would advance to the next circle: casual acquaintances.

Things strangers might do:

Attend activities and events together such as volunteer work; agree to meet up at the gym or movie; meet at a cof-

fee shop to get to know each other better; meet to engage in a sport like running, kayaking, or skateboarding. They might meet at the mall to do some shopping together. It can be any activity that can take place in a public setting that will allow you to get to know the person better.

#4 Casual Acquaintances

You still do not know each other well enough to share personal information. If it feels comfortable or “right”, you might ease into sharing some feelings and thoughts but only “positive” ones about non-controversial topics. You’re there to have fun, share a task or coffee together and you should keep conversation light and friendly. This stage is all about getting to know one another better, but not divulging a lot of personal information or intimate details. If things continue to go well, you would advance to the next circle: friends.

Things casual acquaintances might do:

Attend some of the activities you would if they person were a stranger. At this point it is OK to take some risks to see if you both have things in common such as likes and dislikes, all while using caution, as you still do not know the person very well. You want to make sure they are genuine, and that you have enough in common to consider making this casual acquaintance a friend.

#3 Friends

As you move into this circle, you begin to trust one another more. You feel secure enough when you are in the other person's company to be more spontaneous, laugh, giggle, tease, and share stories and life experiences with each other. It's OK to discuss negative things as long as you spend more time talking about positive ones and leave on an upbeat, emotionally supportive role. If all goes well (give it a couple of months or even a year or more, if needed), you would advance to the next circle: deep friendship.

Things friends might do:

Spend some face-to-face time with the person regularly (at least once every two weeks). Be willing to share personal information and gain personal information about the other person. Be willing to support each other's needs while really getting to know their likes, dislikes, philosophies, and character traits.

Note: There are two other important "friend" categories: romantic friends and romantic lovers.

Romantic friends:

As above, BUT ... you both need to be willing and able to give and receive physical gestures (e.g., hold hands, hug, or kiss).

Romantic lovers:

Ensure that you have discussed sex with your romantic friend and that this is a choice both of you want to make.



#2 Deep Friendships

It takes much longer to reach this stage. By this point both of you have experienced each other closely for so long that you trust each other deeply. You're best friends and intimate friends. Your relationship has been tested and you have seen each other through good times and bad times. You have also seen each other at your worst and survived.

Things deep friends might do:

Moving to this step takes time but also a commitment from both people to continue working on the relationship. If you are struggling with this stage, you may want to read some books that explain more about maintaining relationships (called self-help books). In addition, it might be helpful to seek the assistance of a therapist, or trusted advisor, or counselor.

#1 Self-Intimacy

This innermost circle consists of you and only you! It's healthy to keep some thoughts, ideas, hopes, wishes, dreams, and feeling totally and completely to yourself. On the other hand, staying too much in this circle can prevent others from getting close to you.

And remember:

Healthy friendships move gradually from #5 to #2. It is not healthy to jump from circle to circle without experiencing each one. In other words you would not jump from #5 to #3 after a first meeting. If you do this, you'll be skipping to many boundaries.