

## Why Friends Matter

As union members, we pride ourselves on solidarity, shared purpose, and looking out for one another. But beyond the job site and union hall, there's another kind of connection that deeply impacts our well-being: friendship.

Friendship isn't just a social nicety—it's a mental health necessity. Research consistently shows that strong social bonds reduce stress, improve mood, and even help us live longer. In the demanding world of labor, where long hours, physical strain, and unpredictable schedules are common, having people to lean on can make all the difference.



### Why Friendship Supports Mental Health:

- **Reduces isolation:** Loneliness is a major risk factor for depression and anxiety.
- **Provides emotional support:** Friends help us process challenges and celebrate wins.
- **Boosts resilience:** Knowing someone has your back makes it easier to bounce back from setbacks.
- **Encourages healthy habits:** Friends often influence our choices—positively or negatively.
- **Improves self-worth:** Feeling valued by others reinforces our own sense of worth.

Whether it's grabbing coffee after a shift, checking in with a buddy during a tough time, or sharing a laugh in the breakroom, these moments matter. They're not just good for morale—they're good for your mind.

### Friendship on the Job

Work friendships are unique. They're forged in shared experiences—early mornings, late nights, union meetings, and the ups and downs of the job. These relationships can be a lifeline, especially when work gets stressful.

But sometimes, the grind can make it hard to maintain or deepen these connections. We get busy. We get tired. We assume others are doing fine. That's why it's important to be intentional about building and nurturing friendships at work.

### How to Strengthen Work Friendships:

- **Start small:** Say hello, ask how someone's doing, share a story.
- **Be consistent:** Regular check-ins build trust over time.
- **Offer help:** Lending a hand shows you care.

- **Respect boundaries:** Not everyone wants to talk—listen and respond accordingly.
- **Celebrate together:** Acknowledge birthdays, milestones, and union wins.

Workplace friendships can also help reduce burnout. When we feel connected, we're more likely to stay engaged, feel supported, and cope better with stress. And when we support each other, we build a stronger, healthier union.

### When Friendship Feels Hard

Let's be honest: making and keeping friends isn't always easy. Life gets complicated. People move, schedules clash, misunderstandings happen. And for some, past experiences or mental health challenges can make connection feel risky or exhausting.

If you're struggling to connect, you're not alone—and you're not broken. Sometimes, the first step is simply acknowledging that you want more connection. From there, small actions can lead to meaningful change.

### Tools for Building Connection:

- **Reflect:** What kind of friendships do you want? What's held you back?
- **Reach out:** Send a message, make a call, or join a group.
- **Be vulnerable:** Share something real—it invites others to do the same.
- **Use your MAP:** We're here to help with counseling, support groups, and resources.
- **Practice patience:** Relationships take time. Keep showing up.

Remember, friendship isn't about being perfect—it's about being present. You don't have to do it alone. Your MAP is here to support you in building the connections that help you thrive.

### Final Thought

In the union, we know the value of standing together. Friendship is an extension of that solidarity. It's how we care for each other beyond the job—how we stay strong, sane, and supported.

If you're feeling disconnected or want help strengthening your social ties, reach out to your MAP. We're here for you, because you matter—and so do your friendships.

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your  
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