

## How to Make a Platonic Friendship Work

The key is to set boundaries. And, be honest with your spouse, if you have one.

By [Sara Gaynes Levy](#) Jan 27, 2020



Between love songs, romantic comedies, and will-they-won't-they TV couples, the world has done a pretty good job convincing us that romantic love is paramount. But romantic love's less-discussed sidekick, platonic friendship, is equally important, and it's a key part of maintaining healthy relationships. "In my opinion, society does not place

enough value on platonic love," says Jordana Jacobs, PhD, a psychologist in New York City. This strictly non-sexual relationship "has the potential to be deep, intense, and life-altering," she says. But how to make them work, especially if you're married to someone else, is a question that many couples and friends grapple with.

### "Platonic relationship" basically means a super-deep connection.

This type of friendship can exist between many pairs, though it's most commonly associated with a connection between members of the opposite sex (think: *When Harry Met Sally*). Of course it can also occur between pals of all genders and orientation. It's worth noting that not every friendship is a platonic one. "When you meet a person, there is a process by which you determine what kind of role they'll play in your life, including how close you are meant to be with them," says Jacobs. If you ultimately end up feeling that deep connection, that's platonic love.

### A healthy platonic friendship means no sexual feelings are involved.

"I see platonic love as a special emotional and spiritual relationship between two people," says Diana Raab, PhD, author of *Writing for Bliss*. "It does not involve any type of sexual interest, but there is deep caring, mutual respect, and loyalty," she says.

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Jacobs says that platonic love is actually a helpful building block for romantic love. “It creates a foundation that ultimately allows us to be brave enough to take necessary risks in romantic love, because it’s often more reliable and stable,” she argues.

## Signs you’re in a platonic relationship include feeling that famous “friend crush.”

The friend crush is very real, says Jacobs. This isn’t the butterflies-in-the-stomach kind of nervous crush you get around someone you want to kiss, but more of a compatibility-crush. “That process need not be sexual in nature, but rather is more about the power of human connection in general and its ability to make us feel more alive,” Jacobs explains. “It occurs when we’ve met someone and become infatuated; when we feel seen, understood, and less alone in this world.” That’s how you know you’ve got real platonic love—when you understood.

## The number one rule of a platonic relationship is to maintain boundaries.

This can’t be overemphasized, says Raab. If, for example, you’re traveling with this friend that you could ultimately feel a sexual connection towards (that neither of you are interested in exploring) stay in separate hotel rooms. Also, avoid conversations that could veer towards flirtatiousness. Read: even after a drink or two, unless it’s a road you’re considering exploring, don’t share [those fantasies](#).

## Platonic relationships *can* exist outside a marriage, but be cautious.

It’s normal for your spouse to be jealous of a platonic relationship, says Raab, but communication is crucial to help manage those feelings. “Jealousy is always connected to some kind of fear,” she says. “Being out in the open—saying ‘I’m going to dinner tonight with so-and-so’ instead of ‘I’m going to dinner—helps to solve that fear by showing your partner they’re not losing footing with you.

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And when people start hiding things, *that* is what leads to suspicion and jealousy, she explains. If your spouse is still struggling, ask yourself: are your spouses concerns actually founded and are you willing to give up your marriage for this friend? If not, you may want to scale back the time you spend with the other person.

## Yes, you can be platonically in love with someone.

There seems to be an idea in our culture that platonic love is somehow a threat to romantic love—that you can’t feel both at the same time, in other words. This isn’t true, says Jacobs. Raab agrees—with her own experience as evidence. “There is so much strength in a strong friendship,” she says. “Intimacy does not always enhance that.”

## So, can platonic relationships work?

The short answer is yes—if you’re willing to put in the time. But to make sure no one develops feelings for anyone else, it’s worth checking in with your friend, to check that everyone’s on the same page. “Have an open and clear discussion around what each person wants in the relationship,” says Jacobs. “Even if there is fear around having this conversation, avoiding the topic could do more harm than good. It is possible that the consequences of unexplored, misaligned intentions could result in resentment, and potentially lead to the very end of the friendship.”

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