

# Bridge the gap

It was a couple of years ago, I'd just moved house and invited a friend round for the evening. I had only been living there for a matter of days, and my furniture was covered in stacks of bags and boxes. So, we laid down a picnic blanket on the living room floor, lit some candles, put out a spread, and ate off our laps.

We tucked into our favourite foods, shared secrets, listened to music, and laughed and laughed. Nothing unusual, but I can pinpoint that night as a time when I *really* stopped to acknowledge the full-body warming effect of good, honest, simple friendship.

After that, I made a determined step to prioritise the relationships I had with my friends, but then, you guessed it, the pandemic hit and social plans went on a long-term hiatus. So I learnt a lesson on the power of connection all over again, only this time it was from its absence.

According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, 45% of adults in England feel occasionally, sometimes, or often lonely – and it will come as no surprise to anyone that those numbers have peaked over the past couple of years. Human relationships are vital for our health, both mental and physical, and yet feelings of isolation are far from uncommon.

This issue, we wanted to stop and celebrate the power of connection, delving into the fascinating concept

of social capital on p14 – where we're asking, how *precisely* does friendship enrich our lives? We're also bringing you heartwarming stories of unlikely friendships on p34, and get tips from a life coach on how to apply neuro-linguistic programming principles to your own relationships on p60.

But, also, scattered throughout this issue you will find more than 140 practical tips, ideas, and moments of inspiration, for forging new and maintaining old connections with others. So keep an eye out for those.

Ultimately, when all is said and done, getting that promotion doesn't make laughing with your friends any funnier. The latest must-have gift doesn't mean the comforting presence of a loved one runs any deeper. Picture-perfect holidays can't *really* improve the outpouring of love we already feel for our families (the ones who raised us and the ones we found along the way).

These things exist on a completely different level, and fulfil us in ways nothing material ever can, they have untouchable value to us all – and that's something worth treasuring.

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