

Friendship takes work

We all have only one precious life and it's up to us to make it work. Making being single work for us is about making significant connections with others, which means having a close and intimate friendship network.

People who are not single may make the mistake of regarding single people as not having relationships. That's simply not true. Singles may not have romantic relationships and dependent families, but they usually belong to some sort of family and are engaged in a range of relationships called friendships.

Single people need to work at developing a large friendship network and this will involve different levels of friendship. For example, if a female has a close friend who is now married with toddlers, she is not going to be available to you as much as she once was, but you can still retain the friendship at whatever level works.

It's fine to have friends who occupy different places on your personal intimacy scale – there will be some friends you meet occasionally for coffee, others with whom you might have a regular movie or dinner date, and a closer circle you catch up with often.

In drought-affected Victoria, think of your single status like a plant – all plants need water, but it doesn't matter much whether it comes from the sky, a hose or a bucket. All those sources of water nourish the plant and keep it healthy, just as you are kept emotionally healthy and secure with different sources of friends with varying levels of intimacy.

Making sure you have a good friendship network and a robust sense of yourself is important for everybody, whether single or in a romantic relationship.

Being single when you are older, after being widowed or separated following a long relationship, can be difficult. There are going to be a lot of feelings that are not positive.

You need to find ways to reconnect and develop a new friendship network. This can be scary, but the old advice about finding interest groups of like-minded people is a good start.

It may take time to build a picture of the sort of new connections and relationships you want, and you need to be flexible enough to change that picture if your needs alter.

Dip your toe into some new interests and see what works for you – you might be in for a pleasant surprise.

Survival tips

- **Being single involves developing a range of different levels of friendship networks. Think of this as a fun and interesting experiment rather than as a chore**
- **Put the work into making sure you stay emotionally healthy by enjoying the different levels of relationships you can create**
- **If you are an older single because of widowhood or separation, be brave and try some new interests as a way of meeting like-minded people.**