

Thank you for hosting a “Making Friendships Happen!”

Book Circle*

(*This is a book discussion guide for groups that are meeting four times)

You are not only inspiring more women to learn about healthy relationships by discussing this book, but by inviting a group to come together you're actually fostering meaningful connections, too! Thank you! I wish upon you many blessings for your time together.

**–Shasta Nelson, author of *Friendships Don't Just Happen!*
*The Guide to Creating a Meaningful Circle of Girlfriends***

Getting Ready for the 4 Book Circle Gatherings


1. **A location:** Pick a location that is conducive to discussion: living rooms, hidden coffee shops, low-key wine bars, private dining rooms at restaurants.
2. **Attendees:** Invite women you know (or invite 2 women you know and ask them to each invite 2-3 more!) and get RSVP's. Aim for a group of 5-10.
3. **Dates:** Schedule the first date where your attendees will have time to read the first 4 chapters. Then try to schedule the remaining three with as much consistency as possible (i.e. every Tues night).
4. **Food:** If you're in a living room, tell everyone what they can each help bring to make sure you have snacks and drink for everyone.
5. **Reminder:** Always send out a reminder with all the event details to your attendees the week before and tell them you're looking forward to seeing them.

The following pages have a suggested outline for your 4 get-togethers.

- Week 1: Chapters 1-4
- Week 2: Chapters 5-7
- Week 3: Chapters 8-9
- Week 4: Chapters 10-11

Note: Each group will be unique based on how much time you've scheduled for your Book Circle, how many attendees you have, how talkative the members are, and how well your group knows each other, etc. The following is suggested, but feel free to skip questions or add your own. Pace yourself so 15 minutes before your end time you always have time for the last question and for wrap-up.

1st Week

- 1) Allow 10 to 20 minutes for mixing and mingling as everyone's arriving. (Consider name tags upon arrival if your attendees don't yet know each other.)
 - 2) Gather everyone:
 - a) Welcome & thank them for coming.
 - b) Introduce yourself and tell them why you wanted to do this book discussion.
 - c) Explain that we're doing the first 4 chapters tonight. Next week we'll do chapters 5-7, then our third meeting will be chapters 8 & 9, and our last week will be chapters 10 & 11.
 - 3) Group **Introductions**:
 - a) Go around the circle: "In 2-3 minutes, tell us your name, why you were interested in this book circle, and share with us, like Shasta did in chapter 1, about one time in your life (can be current!) when you felt like you needed to make new/more friends. (Was it b/c of a move? Life stage? Everyone else moved away? You just got too busy?)
 - You go first to model it and give everyone else an extra minute to think about it. Remember to keep yours under 3 minutes as everyone else is likely to copy your length.
 - Make sure to keep the introductions moving, don't start commenting on each other's shares or get off track from the introductions.
 - 4) **Chapter 1**: Now, get into smaller groups of 3's (or 2's if under 5 people) and share with each other one part of chapter 1 that struck you. (i.e. Something you underlined? Something that spoke to you? Something that surprised you? Something that described how you've felt before?)
 - 5) In **chapter 2** Shasta described the 5 Circles of Connectedness that show the various types of friends, starting with Contact Friends on the far left and moving to the Committed Friends on the far right (pages 23-32). In what way(s) was this helpful to you? Or more specifically, what was one ah-ha you had or something you learned as you read through the descriptions?
 - You can open this up for group discussion, but if a few people are doing all the talking, feel free to ask, "Does anyone else want to share?" Or, "X, we'd love to hear your observations if you want to share?"
 - 6) Now, turn to one person next to you and share with each other which of the 5 circles feels best to you right now? Which one feels "full?" Or, most "meaningful?" In other words, which one is coming most naturally to you right now? (set a phone timer to ring in 5 minutes.)
 - 7) Now, turn to the person on the other side and share with each other which of the 5 circles feels most challenging right now? Which one feels the "emptiest?" Or, the one you wish you had more connection in. (set a phone timer to ring in 5 minutes.)
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8) Now let's come back together for this next question. In **Chapter 3** Shasta highlighted 4 different imbalances or friendship needs that we can each experience at different times (pages 50-57):

- a) A Low Right-Side: Need Deeper Friends
- b) Either Side Low: Need More Friends
- c) Middle Circle Imbalance: Need Current Friends
- d) Right Side Full: Need Specific Friends

Let's take a poll to see which one we each are currently struggling with (or have recently) and then we'll all talk about them. Remember half the theme of the book is that's normal to experience these needs! ☺ (Have everyone raise their hands for the one that they most struggle with.)

Sharing question: Was this discovery a surprise to you in some ways? Was it helpful to have it articulated? What information does this give you now?

9) In this book Shasta coins the word Frientimacy—Friendship Intimacy—and refers to it repeatedly. In **chapter 4**, in the section where she's defining it, she says this on page 60:

"I'm struck by how often we all say we want BFF's—Committed Friends—and yet how little we seem to understand what that means. We romanticize the stories, almost more than we do in romance...."

Then on the next page she continues with,

"We don't get there {Frientimacy} without awkwardness, hurt feelings, and pain. Those things are part of life, and if you want the quintessential friend who is "always there for you," then that means showing up for each other when you're both at your worst. Which also happens to be when you're the messiest, the most needy, and the least impressive."

She's basically saying that Frientimacy is both all the things we want, and many of the things we don't. How did you feel when you were reading that part? Do you agree? Has that been true for you?

- I'd suggest open group conversation for this part. Let everyone talk a bit, but you don't want to get stuck here. So after 5-10 minutes, go to the next question.

10) *If you have time:* In this same chapter, Shasta shares the **Five Stages of Frientimacy**—Curiosity, Exploratory, Familiarity, Vulnerability, and Frientimacy—which of those stages do you think is hardest for most people? Why?

11) Ask someone to read "I Have a Theory that Friendship Can Save the World" (Or show the 2 minute clip of Shasta reciting it on the homepage of ShastaNelson.com)

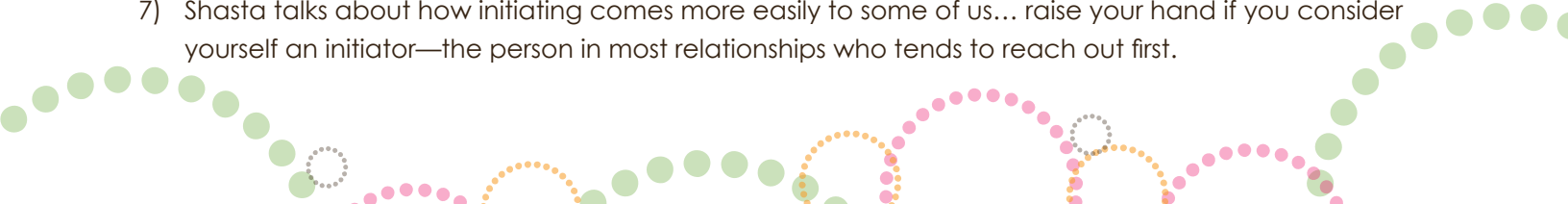


12) Wrap it up

- a) Take a group photo with the girls and their books. Tweet, Facebook, and/or Instagram with #ShastasBook. (On Facebook, tag us at GirlFriendCircles.com)
- b) Make sure everyone knows how to connect with each other afterward—ask if you can share everyone's emails with the group? Do you want to start a Facebook Group Page?
- c) Shasta will be writing her blogs in the upcoming months based on readers questions so feel free to send any big questions that came up to Shasta@GirlFriendCircles.com.
- d) Thank everyone for coming. Remind them to read chapters 5-7 for next week.



2nd Week

- 1) Gather everyone:
 - a) Welcome & thank them for coming.
 - b) We're discussing chapters 5-7 tonight.
 - 2) Group **Introductions**:
 - a) So Shasta's favorite sharing question is what she calls a "high/low" and we'll be doing it every week when we get together. Go around the circle: "In 2-3 minutes, tell us your name again and share with us one highlight from this last week and one lowlight. A highlight might be a good decision you've made, something you've achieved, a meaningful conversation you had, etc. It can be anything that made you happy. A lowlight might be something that caused stress, a tough conversation you had, a frustrating experience, or something you've just been worrying about. It can be anything that felt sad, scary, or frustrating."
 - Remind everyone that they can share whatever they want. And that the rest of us who are listening will simply say "Thank you for sharing," after each person is done.
 - You share first to model it and give everyone else an extra minute to think about it. Remember to keep yours under 3 minutes as everyone else is likely to copy your length.
 - Make sure to keep the introductions moving, don't start commenting on each other's shares or get off track from the introductions, simply say "Thanks for sharing" and move to the next person.
 - 3) On pages 76-78, in **Chapter 5 titled "Being Open"**, Shasta shares research that it matters less about *what* we have in common, and more about the fact that we just need to find some commonality. Basically, that quantity of commonality matters as much as the quality of how much that commonality means to us. In partners, think of one friend you've had that proves that point and tell the other person about her. Who have you been close to that surprised you, or perhaps you appeared as opposites almost? Or maybe you had a 20-year age gap, came from completely different places, or were in different life stages? The point is, think of an example of someone you've bonded to even though you didn't have some of the "obvious" things in common. (It's powerful for our brains to remember these stories!)
 - 4) Of the seven benefits to Left-Side Friends that Shasta highlights on pages 84-88, which one do you value/appreciate the most and why? Go around the circle...
 - 5) Now, get into smaller groups of 3's (or 2's if under 5 people) and share with each other one part of chapter 5 that struck you. (i.e. Something you underlined? Something that spoke to you? Something that surprised you? Something that described how you've felt before?)
 - 6) **Chapter 6**: Shasta claims that it's for lack of momentum—not seeing each other consistently enough—that most friendships simply don't grow to become as meaningful as they could be. Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - 7) Shasta talks about how initiating comes more easily to some of us... raise your hand if you consider yourself an initiator—the person in most relationships who tends to reach out first.
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- a) Everyone with their hand raised—get in a group and talk about the hardest part of being an initiator. What would make it easier?
- b) Everyone else who doesn't see themselves as initiators in their friendships—get into a group and share why it's hard for you to initiate. What would make it easier?
- c) Set a phone timer for 5-6 minutes.
- d) Bring everyone back together and have each group report to the other what they shared.


8) Chapter 7: Positivity. For our final share this evening, let's actually practice positivity! Go around the circle and tell the person to your left one specific thing you really appreciate about them. Affirm her for who she is, what she gives to the world, the unique way she blesses people, or characteristics you admire in her.

9) Wrap it up

- a) Any logistics need to be planned for next week? Is everyone communicating in between meetings as much as they want?
- b) Shasta will be writing her blogs in the upcoming months based on readers questions so feel free to send any big questions that came up to Shasta@GirlFriendCircles.com.
- c) Thank everyone for coming. Remind them to read chapters 8-9 for next week.



3rd Week

- 1) Gather everyone:
 - a) Welcome & thank them for coming.
 - b) We're discussing chapters 8-9 tonight.
 - 2) Group **Introductions**:
 - a) Time for this week's "High/Low" Question: Go around the circle: "In 2-3 minutes, and share with us one highlight from this last week and one lowlight. A highlight might be a good decision you've made, something you've achieved, a meaningful conversation you had, etc. It can be anything that made you happy. A lowlight might be something that caused stress, a tough conversation you had, a frustrating experience, or something you've just been worrying about. It can be anything that felt sad, scary, or frustrating."
 - Remind everyone that they can share whatever they want. And that the rest of us who are listening will simply say "Thank you for sharing," after each person is done.
 - You share first to model it and give everyone else an extra minute to think about it. Remember to keep yours under 3 minutes as everyone else is likely to copy your length.
 - Make sure to keep the introductions moving, don't start commenting on each other's shares or get off track from the introductions, simply say "Thanks for sharing" and move to the next person.
 - 3) So now that everyone has read all **five steps to friendship**—Be open, Initiate consistently, add positivity, increase vulnerability, and practice forgiveness—which step is the most difficult one for you? Raise hands to take a vote. Then whichever step wins—spend 10-15 minutes talking about it as a group:
 - (1) What makes this step so hard?
 - (2) What parts of that chapter were most helpful to me?
 - (3) What can we learn from each other about this?
 - 4) So now let's look at more specific pieces of the last 2 steps. Chapter 8 is about **Vulnerability**. Shasta shares Rabbi Harold Kushner's observation on page 151 that our greatest human fear is rejection. Do you agree? Disagree? Why? And if it's true, how have you found it most helpful to develop friendships in spite of the occasional fears and insecurities?
 - 5) Now, get into pairs and share whether you personally find it harder to share the good stuff in your life (i.e. your successes, wins, achievements, good relationship stuff) or the painful stuff (i.e. your insecurities, fears, failures, bad relationship stuff)? Why do you think that is? And, are you interested in practicing more vulnerability in that area with friends? (set phone time for 6 minutes)
 - 6) Then switch partners, and using the Frientimacy Triangle as a guide, do your insecurities around friendship tend to show up more along the bottom of the triangle (with women you don't know as well) or toward the top of the triangle (with women you know better but where greater intimacy is called for)? (set phone timer for 6 minutes)
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- 7) Last question of our time together touches on chapter 9 where she talks about Forgiveness. Shasta makes a pretty big deal about forgiveness. In fact she starts that chapter out by saying,

“All friendships rise and fall with the repeated call to forgiveness. We can do perfectly the first four steps of friendship—be open, initiate consistently, add positivity, increase vulnerability—and still not have long-lasting and meaningful friendships for lack of going through this required step of practicing forgiveness.

One interesting statement in that chapter was at the bottom of page 174 where she says:

“...out of the five core emotions—sadness, fear, anger, joy, and euphoria—that... women have the hardest time identifying anger, often mislabeling it as sadness.”

Her point is that if we don't acknowledge when we're frustrated, then we don't realize that we need to step into forgiveness. What is one thing from that chapter that you're taking away? What was one thing that was helpful or spoke to you?

- 8) Wrap it up
- a) Any logistics need to be planned for next week? Is everyone communicating in between meetings as much as they want?
 - b) Shasta will be writing her blogs in the upcoming months based on readers questions so feel free to send any big questions that came up to Shasta@GirlFriendCircles.com.
 - c) Thank everyone for coming. Remind them to read chapters 8-9 for next week.



4th Week

1) Gather everyone:

- a) Welcome & thank them for coming.
- b) We're discussing chapters 10-11 tonight.

2) Group **Introductions:**

- a) Time for this week's "High/Low" Question: Go around the circle: "In 2-3 minutes, and share with us one highlight from this last week and one lowlight. A highlight might be a good decision you've made, something you've achieved, a meaningful conversation you had, etc. It can be anything that made you happy. A lowlight might be something that caused stress, a tough conversation you had, a frustrating experience, or something you've just been worrying about. It can be anything that felt sad, scary, or frustrating."
 - Remind everyone that they can share whatever they want. And that the rest of us who are listening will simply say "Thank you for sharing," after each person is done.
 - You share first to model it and give everyone else an extra minute to think about it. Remember to keep yours under 3 minutes as everyone else is likely to copy your length.
 - Make sure to keep the introductions moving, don't start commenting on each other's shares or get off track from the introductions, simply say, "Thanks for sharing" and move to the next person.

3) Chapter 10 starts with this line: "One of the ironies about Frientimacy is that while most of us crave it, it is a stage filled with things we often want to avoid." Indeed, she shares in pages 195-198 that this is where most of us walk away or give up (or put up with things but often with growing resentment). When you read those pages what emotional response did you have? What feelings came up for you?

4) Toxic Friends: On pages 199-202, Shasta shares her feelings about the term "Toxic Friends." Do you agree or disagree? Are some people toxic? What makes someone toxic or not?

5) 5 Friendship Threats: Of the five friendship threats that Shasta highlighted—Blame, Jealousy, Judgment, Non-reciprocation, and Neglect—which one bugs you the most or feels like it shows up the most often around you?

- a) Take a poll. Everyone raise your hand for the one you feel interferes in friendship the most. Break into smaller groups based on who else raised their hand for the same one (i.e. those who raised their hand for blame becomes a group together. If only one person raises their hand for one, pair them up with another person who didn't have anyone raise their hand for theirs).
- b) In your small groups, share one part of Shasta's suggestions about healthy ways of responding to that threat that spoke to you. (Set timer for 10 minutes.)



- 6) On page 213, Shasta wonders if one of the reasons some relationships feel imbalanced is because we all give to each other differently. If you know your love language--Acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, gift giving, and quality time—share it and give us examples. Otherwise, just share with us how you tend to give your best to your friendships. Go around the circle and let each person share.
- 7) In **Chapter 11** Shasta talks about deciding your next steps for fostering friendships. Share with us one of your commitments or next steps for developing the friendships that matter most to you.
- 8) Shasta talks on page 216 about how important it is for us to all learn how to ask for what we need. Let's end by going around the group and finishing this sentence, "If I were to be completely honest, what I most need from those of you in this group as we go forward in our friendship is...."
 - After everyone shares—talk about what you heard from each other. What were similar themes?
- 9) Wrap it up/Logistics
 - a) A Suggestion: Schedule your next get-together! Does your group want to keep meeting weekly? Or do you just want to meet at a restaurant for dinner in a few weeks? Always schedule the next one to keep up the consistency!
 - b) Shasta will be writing her blogs in the upcoming months based on readers questions so feel free to send any big questions that came up to Shasta@GirlFriendCircles.com.
 - c) Thank everyone for coming.

