

Script – Broadcast – Why male friendships matter

INTRO

Whenever Paul Engelman's wife left the house to join friends at their monthly book club gathering, the Rockford resident found himself looking for something to do. With all their children grown and out of the house, he could watch a sporting event or knock out some items from his honey-do list. But what he really was looking for was a social outlet of his own.

Over the years, Engelman has had plenty of male friends. Guys he grew up with, attended school with or served with in the military. But now in his 60s, he has few friends he would consider close knit. So he started a group called the No Book Book Club (NBBC). For the past four years, members of the NBBC meet on a regular basis, much like their wives do with their book club. Anywhere from five to 10 guys get together to simply hang out. It might be at Engelman's house to watch a football game, or a visit to a neighborhood establishment for trivia night. Some of the members have even joined an indoor golf league. The only thing the group doesn't do is read books.

((SOT))

Paul Engelman, founder, No Book Book Club

"I put out the call to put together the No Book Book Club, and the response was energetic. There are guys who are in our age group, are late in their work life, or retired, have children out of the house, or who have a gap when it comes to male friends." (:17)

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Engelman isn't alone in that sense. According to a [survey](#) by the Survey Center on American Life, fewer than half of the men responding are happy with their friendships. Only about one in five said they had received emotional support from a friend in the last week, compared with four in 10 women. In 2021, 15% of U.S. men admitted to having no close friends, which was five times more than 1990. And men with six or more good friends dropped from 55% to 27% during that same period.

Male friendships are important for many reasons, according to experts. Friendships foster bonding, connection, support and even validation. Friendships give men not only social outlets, but opportunities to bond over things that consume our lives, such as family, health, work and financial issues.

Victor Mendoza is a behavioral health provider with OSF HealthCare. He says friendships usually call for some emotional vulnerability which may make some men uncomfortable.

((SOT))

Victor Mendoza, behavioral health provider, OSF HealthCare

"I think one of the barriers that men have is that we have a hard time opening up, because that has been seen as a weakness. That affects them from communicating with other men about their feelings, and what they have going on. That just creates more isolation, which leads to depression or anxiety." (:19)

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Mendoza says there's nothing wrong with hanging out with a male sibling or cousin. But if you're seeking friendship outside of your family circle, he recommends connecting with community resources such as church, fitness centers or other social gathering places. Engelman says forming his men's group has been extremely rewarding. He adds that the camaraderie he gets from his male friends provides the balance he was looking for in life.