Dear Alice,

What sort of a present would be suitable for a male friend, 22, from me, male 20? Something he will treasure and can remember me by when he sees it? We are normal college mates only.

Thanks Alice,
Sagittarian

Answer

Dear Sagittarian,

Your options abound when it comes to special presents for your friend. By saying that you and your male friend are "normal college mates only," do you mean not romantically involved? Or are you just acquaintances and not necessarily best friends? There are lots of different kinds of healthy relationships — and it’s common to have ones varying in closeness and intensity. Culture plays a role in what’s considered acceptable for two folks who identify as men to express their care for one another in terms of physical or verbal expressions or through the exchange of mementos. It's also worth mentioning that in some cultures, these notions have evolved over time. But this doesn't mean you can't express your true feelings; perhaps breaking through barriers may help you live a joyful and authentic life. No matter how close the relationship with your buddy, there are endless possibilities for how you can show you care.

When considering what to give your pal, you may want to think about your budget, his interests, activities you've enjoyed together, and how well you know one another. Gifts don't need to be expensive to have a lot of meaning. In fact, for many people, homemade gifts that have had time and thought poured into them, rather than money, are often the most touching of all.

Here are a few suggestions to get your creativity going. You may wish to get him a physical gift, such as:

- A journal or book with a special inscription
- A plant to brighten up his room
- A luxury version of an item he uses every day: cashmere socks, a sleek comb, a
monogrammed money clip
- A t-shirt or hat with the logo or name of a favorite sports team, band, or place you've been together
- A magazine subscription or other subscription service related to his interests or career goals
- A new album that your friend's been wanting (i.e., vinyl, digital download) or a customized playlist of songs you think he'll enjoy
- A "found object" or an item that reminds you of an experience you've shared together: beach pebbles placed in a jar, map and postcards from a trip with your destinations noted, or maybe photographs in an album
- A letter on nice stationary explaining what his friendship has meant to you
- A framed print by an artist your friend admires or by you
- A basket of cooking utensils or food items from his favorite cuisine
- A game (of the board, card, or video variety) that you can both play together

If a tangible item doesn't seem to fit the bill, you might consider getting him the gift of an experience. What's great about this option is that it can afford you another opportunity to strengthen your bond and make more special memories together. These sorts of gifts could include:

- Tickets to see a movie, play, concert, or sporting event together
- Membership to a museum that you may explore together
- A planned trip: perhaps fishing, hiking, driving to a new town or city

These are just a few ideas, but hopefully it helps get the wheels of pal-appreciation spinnin'. No matter what you decide, it's clear you care a lot about your friend. And showing you care really is priceless — a notion that is supported by research about friendships among men. Though gift-giving has shown a positive impact, the length of the friendship and dependability have both been identified as predictors of intimacy (closeness) in those friendships. Maintenance of friendships among men was also predicted by the length of the friendship as well as reports of mutual support and having shared histories. With this in mind, you might consider that being a best bud doesn't have to cost anything at all!

Alice!
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