

# Friends with benefits—what a sex and relationship therapist wants you to know

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There are many kinds of sexual situations people can get into—everything from committed monogamous relationships to a one-night stand. But friends with benefits (FWB) situations are often still

seen as controversial, perhaps because of the potential for heartbreak.

Typically, FWB [arrangements](#) involve two people engaging in casual sexual activities without the expectations and constraints often associated with romantic partnerships. Unlike a fling or a hook up there is often an understanding that the situation is indefinite and that the friendship may resume or continue even if the physical [relationship](#) ends.

Different types of relationships can serve different purposes.

Psychological research into FWB arrangements has shown they can be more complicated than media portrayals [give them credit for](#). Unlike a fling or a hook up, FWB [arrangements](#), often involve understanding that the situation is indefinite and that the friendship may resume even if the physical relationship ends.

It's not for everyone. Recognizing your relationship preference is key to understanding whether FWB can work for you or not. If you're trying to decide whether it's for you, take some time to think about how you approach commitment. Consider, for example, whether you have a strong inclination towards exclusive relationships.

[Research suggests](#) that some people lean towards a committed monogamous relationship while others are comfortable with arrangements across the spectrum of casual and noncommittal arrangement types.

FWB relationships tend to fall [into three camps](#): best friends, sex only and network opportunities. Sex-only relations for example, focus on the physical aspect, while the motivation for network opportunity relationships revolves around opportunity and access to each other's social circles. Best friends relationships often enjoy both a physical and platonic connection.

## The benefits

Research shows many people have a positive experience: it doesn't always end in disaster.

One of the main perks is that FWB relationships give people [sexual freedom](#), without the constraints of a monogamous romantic partnership. It is like having a trusted partner to experiment with and to enjoy [regular consensual sex](#), but with [greater emotional independence](#).

FWB setups give partners the [space and time](#) to explore different relationship styles, as people go through different stages in their lives. For example, one person may be going through a phase where they want more than a one-night stand but are not quite ready for a long-term commitment.

FWB relationships may in fact empower [younger women](#) to get their sexual needs met in a way that is similar to men's ability to do so through casual one-time encounters. Some women report they are more likely to have their sexual needs met in a FWB situation than a hook up.

For instance, in one study of US university students, [young women](#) said FWB was a situation where they were [encouraged to express their sexuality](#) and were not "held back" by society's double standards such as slut shaming. So it can be an important part of people's sexual and relational development that allows them to explore different parts of themselves.

## The downsides

Jumping into a FWB is not without its risks. You could end up [losing the friendship](#). Perhaps one person hopes for more than a casual liaison,

while the other person wants to [keep things simple](#) and physical. The person who wants a deeper relationship may avoid rocking the boat out of fear [the arrangement will end](#) if they tell the truth. Those [unequal feelings](#) can end up causing heartache.

It is also worth mentioning that some people may deliberately give their FWB the idea it could lead to commitment so that they can get intimacy as they want. Here are some signs your FWB partner has malicious intentions:

- coercing you into in sexual acts you've expressed reluctance to participate in
- refusing to practice safe sex
- [gaslighting](#) (manipulating you into questioning your own sanity or powers of reasoning)
- unwillingness to negotiate emotional boundaries.

Of course, some cultures [reject the idea of](#) non-monogamous relationships. As long as unorthodox relationships such as FWB lack universal recognition, they are vulnerable to stigma and judgment.

## What to keep in mind

As you spend more time in a FWB relationship, feelings can sneak in when you least expect it, which can hit one person harder than the other. This is one of the most challenging complications of this type of relationship. Some people might avoid these kind of conversations because they might fear it sounds like they're taking the relationship more seriously than the other. Yet, it is important to know where you stand to avoid [psychological distress](#), uncertainty and [esteem issues](#).

There is no [no rulebook](#) for how to steer FWBs. But be upfront about your feelings and boundaries and manage expectations. This can help

[minimize misunderstandings](#). If you discover you both want different things out of the situation, reassess whether it's time to find a more compatible partnership somewhere else.

Also remember to practice safe sex. [Studies show](#) that when people trust their partner, they are less likely to use condoms. Unprotected sex puts all parties at risk for [STIs and unwanted pregnancies](#).

Navigating FWB setups can be tricky. From a sex therapist's point of view, there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to relationships. This arrangement should work as long as you both want the same things.

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