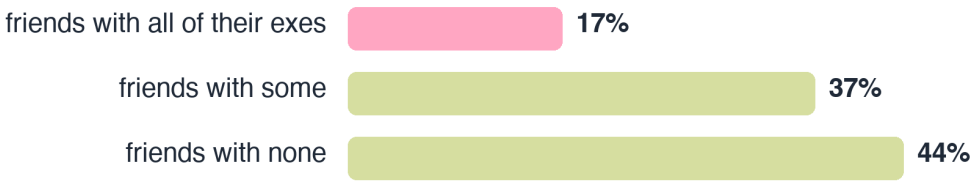
Can you stay friends with an ex?

YouGov asked American adults who have an ex whether they are still friends. The biggest group said: with none of them.



YouGov, 15-19 September 2022, 1,000 US adults with at least one ex.

But more than half are still friends with at least one ex. Is it a good idea? A 2003 song gives one very clear answer.

Meet the song

White Flag · Dido, 2003

From the album *Life for Rent*. The relationship is over, but the singer still loves him and refuses to give up: there will be no white flag.

She connects what is true now with what happened before. Joining two times is the job of a mixed conditional.



Photo: Dido by Raph_PH, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, cropped.

Listen and read

Play the song in **Spotify**, **Apple Music** or **YouTube Music** with the lyrics switched on.

Where to look	What to find
Verse 1	One line: *if* + past simple (now), then *would have* + past participle (before). The mixed line.
Verse 2	Two *if* lines about what he does now.
The bridge	*When we meet* + *will*: a first conditional about the future.
The chorus	*will* and *won't* with no *if*: a promise.

Two times, one sentence

The if part	The result	Example
past cause *had + past participle*	**present** result *would + verb*	*If I'd saved money, I'd be on holiday now.*
present situation *past simple*	**past** result *would have + past participle*	*If I were braver, I'd have said something.*

Ask two questions: when is the if part, and when is the result?

Good to know

1. **Mixed is the natural next step** after the second and third conditional: you take one half from each.
2. **Time words help:** *now, today, still* point to a present result.
3. **could and might** work in the result too: *If I'd learned to drive, I could drive to work.*
4. **Present situations are often permanent:** *If I weren't afraid of heights, I'd have tried skydiving.*

Song titles and artist names are used for identification only. esl.laboratory is not affiliated with or endorsed by the artists or their labels.

Practice

Exercise 1
Read the lyrics as you listen. Circle the right answer.

1. In the verse 1 line, the *if* part is about **now** / **the past**.
2. Its result is about **now** / **the past**.
3. The bridge starts with **If** / **When** and is about **the future** / **the past**.
4. In the chorus, she uses **would** / **will**.

Exercise 2
Then and now. Match each past event to its result today.

1. I didn't learn to drive. _____
2. She moved to Lisbon. _____
3. We missed the last train. _____
4. I stayed up all night. _____
5. He didn't study medicine. _____

A. She speaks Portuguese.
B. I'm exhausted.
C. He isn't a doctor.
D. I can't drive to work.
E. We're stuck at the station.

Exercise 3
Third or mixed? Write T or M.

1. If I had left earlier, I wouldn't have missed the train. ____
2. If I had left earlier, I wouldn't be so stressed now. ____
3. If she spoke French, she would have got the job. ____
4. If we had known, we would have called you. ____
5. If he weren't so shy, he would have asked her out. ____

Exercise 4
Complete the mixed conditionals with the verbs in brackets.

1. If she _____ (not move) to Lisbon, she _____ (not speak) Portuguese.
2. If we _____ (not miss) the train, we _____ (not be) stuck here.
3. If he _____ (study) medicine, he _____ (be) a doctor now.
4. If I _____ (be) more organised, I _____ (not forget) your birthday.

Exercise 5
Present situation, past result. Write one sentence.

1. I'm not brave, so I didn't say anything.
   _____
2. She doesn't like crowds, so she didn't go to the concert.
   _____
3. He isn't very patient, so he didn't wait for us.
   _____

Exercise 6
Each sentence has one mistake. Write it correctly.

1. If I had studied medicine, I would have been a doctor now.
   _____
2. If I would be braver, I would have spoken.
   _____
3. If she hadn't moved, she wouldn't spoke Portuguese.
   _____
4. If he hadn't lost his job, he would had more money now.
   _____

Exercise 7
One decision. Think of a choice you made. How would your life be different now? (50 to 70 words)

DECISIONS YOU COULD WRITE ABOUT

where you studied	learning, or not learning, a language
a job you took or turned down	a hobby you started or gave up
moving to a new city or country	a friend you met by chance

SENTENCE STARTERS

A few years ago I decided to ...	If I had ..., I'd be ... now.
If I hadn't ..., I wouldn't ... now.	If I were more ..., I'd have ...