

Making New Friends as an Adult

Overview

Tips on expanding your circle of friends, whether you have moved to a new community or lived in the same one for years.

- Tips on making new friends
- Reaching out to others
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Making friends can be more complicated in adulthood than in childhood. It isn't always easy to get to know new people or develop the trust and affection that make for a lasting friendship. If you've moved recently, or if your old friends seem to be less interested in the activities you used to enjoy together, you may wonder how you can find people who share your interests and values.

It's important to remember that there's a link between friendship and physical and mental well-being. The stronger your ties to other people, the happier and healthier you are likely to be. Some studies have found that solid friendships even strengthen the immune system, because feelings of warmth and caring tend to lower the levels of chemicals associated with stress in the human body. Reaching out to other people -- at work, in your community, or by mail or through the Internet -- can help you gain the many benefits that enduring friendships offer.

Tips on making new friends

Making friends often results from a lucky accident. You may strike up a fascinating conversation while waiting for an elevator or standing in line at the bank. Or while you're watching your child's soccer game, you may meet another parent who shares an unusual interest that you thought nobody had but you. You can't plan for events like these, but you can make yourself available for them. Here are some tips:

- *Spend time outdoors.* Read the newspaper in a park on your lunch hour, not at home, or open your mail on your front steps instead of at the kitchen table.
- *Walk or take public transportation.* Take the bus or walk instead of driving. To boost your chances of seeing familiar faces, stick to a regular schedule or route.
- *Join a carpool.* If you can't walk or use public transportation, join an office carpool, or volunteer for a carpool for your children's social or athletic events.
- *Exercise with others.* Do your aerobic exercises at the YMCA/YWCA or a gym instead of at home, or swim at the same time each day or week at a community pool.

- *Shop selectively.* Buy your sports equipment or CDs at specialty stores instead of by mail, and check their bulletin boards for events of interest to sports or music lovers.
- *Get a dog.* Walk your dog at the same time each day, and you'll probably find that people love talking to the owner of a friendly pet.
- *Use the Internet.* If you have a computer, visit the Web sites for your town and for local colleges to stay up to date on community activities. If you don't have a computer, most local libraries provide free access to the Internet.
- *Remember that you can share solitary activities with others.* If you love to read, find out if your public library or bookstore has readings by local authors or a book discussion group. If you like to draw or paint, take your sketchbook or easel to the park, the playground, or a nature preserve that attracts a lot of visitors.

Reaching out to others

Being willing to reach out to others instead of waiting for them to come to you will bring potential friends into your life and make it easier to get to know them. Here are some ways to let people know that you're open to new friendships.

- *Take a positive approach.* Try to maintain a cheerful and enthusiastic attitude even if you've had a lot of trouble making friends in your community. If you complain about how hard it is to meet people -- even if your complaints are justified -- people may wonder if you're sincere about wanting to get to know others.
- *Ask for advice.* If you're new to a community, let people know when you need the name of a good doctor, auto repair shop, or children's piano teacher. Asking for advice shows people that you're open to ideas and willing to listen. Even if you've lived in your community for years, you may be able to start a conversation by asking a film- or food lover to recommend a movie or restaurant.
- *Be flexible.* Rethinking a few of your ideas about your social life may make it easier to make new friends. For example, if you're married and tend to socialize with other couples, consider reaching out to single people who might welcome an invitation to your Thanksgiving dinner or a Fourth of July barbecue. If you're single, don't assume that married acquaintances always want to do everything together.
- *Make friends with co-workers.* Try to attend company-sponsored social or other events that give you a chance to get to know your co-workers. Making friends may be easier at work than in other settings because you see your co-workers regularly. If you aren't sure how to get started, consider organizing a lunch-hour book group or an after-work softball game, or volunteering to collect

donations from employees who'd like to send flowers or a gift to a co-worker who is ill.

- *Connect with someone every day.* If you have a lot of family and work responsibilities, it's easy to get sidetracked from making or strengthening friendships. Trying to get in touch with one friend -- new or old -- by letter or phone every day will help you keep strengthening your ties to others no matter how busy you are. Sending amusing cartoons or newspaper articles is an easy way to let friends or potential friends know you're thinking about them.
- *If you don't use e-mail yet, try it out.* E-mail can make it easier to reach out to new friends, partly because messages sent this way let people respond when it's most convenient. If you don't have a computer, remember that you can send e-mail at no cost from many public libraries by using library computers and free e-mail services. You might want to consider investing in a device that has a keyboard and screen designed exclusively for sending and receiving e-mail. (These are much less expensive than a computer.)
- *Give a party.* If you'd like to meet a lot of people quickly, have a party. You might invite the people on your street, the families from your child's school or child care center, or the tenants in your apartment building. If you aren't ready to start entertaining, find out if you can help with a party at your child's school or an organization you belong to, such as a potluck dinner at your church or synagogue.

Getting involved in your community

The easiest way to make new friends is usually by doing something you love. Joining a sports or hobbyists' club -- or taking a class or doing volunteer work -- doesn't just boost your chances of connecting with people who share your interests. It also gives you a way to stay involved with others until the new friendships develop. You may find it much easier to make friends if you:

- *Become a volunteer.* Offer to help out at a social, political, professional, or similar organization in your community. Even if you have an extremely busy schedule, you may find that you can help out on a limited or short-term basis -- for example, by working one night a month at a soup kitchen, handing out leaflets during the week before an election, or volunteering once or twice a year at your child's school.
- *Join a club.* Watch the calendar of events in a local newspaper for meetings of interesting groups, or ask a librarian to help you track down the kind of club that you'd like to join. If you're new to your community, find out if your city or town has a newcomers club for people who have recently moved to the area. You might be able to find out about clubs for new residents at a community center or YMCA/YWCA.

- *Sign up for a night class.* Take a class in tennis, conversational Spanish, flower-arranging, or another subject that interests you. Besides attracting people who share your interests, these classes will probably help you find out about related community activities that you might also like to try.
- *Start a group.* If you can't find a group that interests you, consider forming a club for the kind of people you'd like to meet, such as a walking club or a group for new mothers. Put a notice on a community bulletin board (or in a community newspaper) describing the kind of group you'd like to form and how people can reach you.
- *Attend religious services.* Visit several churches, synagogues, or other houses of worship before you make a decision about which to join. You may find that some of these seem much friendlier than others, or have many more of the kind of activities that interest you or your children.

Talking with new friends

At first, talking with new friends may seem very different from having a conversation with people you've known for years. It may take a while for you to feel completely at ease with someone you've just met. Sharing your thoughts and feelings tells people that you care about them and want to know them better.

- *Be a good listener.* Encourage your new friend to talk about what's on his or her mind, whether it's a tough assignment at work or a child's part in a school play. Making clear that you want to listen to good news or bad encourages people to confide in you.
- *Share a confidence.* If you're shy or aren't used to opening up to others, start with small confidences and work up to the things that are more important to you. Sharing a confidence -- big or small -- is a way of saying that you trust your new friend.
- *Ask questions.* Make a special effort to ask follow-up questions on important news that your friend has told you. Inquire about the results of tests, a meeting with a child's teacher, or the results of a bowling tournament. Asking thoughtful questions shows that you've been listening and makes a friend feel valued and understood.
- *Look for shared interests.* Ask your friend about hobbies and vacations or just how he or she spent the weekend. Learning more about these things may suggest ideas and activities that you can explore together, or just give you ideas about how you can be a helpful and considerate friend.

- ***Praise your friend.*** Show that you appreciate your acquaintance's strengths or achievements (and be sure to pass along any compliments about your friend that you've heard from others). Say how much you admire a new outfit or the helpful comments that your friend made at a meeting at work. Giving a lot of praise will reassure your friend that -- even though the two of you don't always see eye to eye -- you still feel the trust and respect that are the foundation of a good friendship.

Remember, too, that your employee resource program or employee assistance program may be able to provide helpful information and resources.