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FROM THE DESK OF DR JENN HARDY

A quarterly-ish newsletter



How to Find Friends as a Grown-Up

Since I last wrote a newsletter, I've had the opportunity to be interviewed by a couple of great podcast hosts. Be sure to check them out in the "Writing and Media" section of my website. You can also find my previous newsletters there as well.

As I allowed my mind to wander for newsletter topics, I was reminded of a conversation that I had with a friend not too long ago. She, like many of us, was surprised by how difficult it is to find friends once we settle into adult life. It can catch many of us off guard, especially if we didn't have problems finding and keeping friends when we were in school.

It's like the rules quietly change in adulthood. Instead of spending your evenings and weekends hanging out with co-workers, we find that our co-workers are already busy with friends and families of their own. So what do we do? Keep reading to find out the tips that have worked for me and the clients I've helped with these same issues.

@drjennhardy

How to Make Friends After High School and College

- Practice small talk A LOT.
 - Practice with people who have a lot of practice like cashiers, hair stylists, and wait staff at restaurants. Look for friendly faces.
 - You'll find yourself feeling more comfortable and confident as you practice small talk more.
 - You may find that these conversations build over time as you bump into them again and again.
 - For me, quick chats after my spin class have slowly turned into deeper and more meaningful relationships over time. It's nice to feel like a part of a group, even if I don't find my new best friend there.
- Get off your phone.
 - Look up and around. Your phone is signaling to others that you don't want to talk.
 - Everyone has already figured out that people hide in their phones when they can't tolerate being alone in a group. It's a show of confidence to buck the trend.
- Be on the lookout for people who are looking for friends, too.
 - It makes me think of those pesky dance cards in Jane Austen movies. Some dance cards are full. There's no room for your name to be added to the list.
 - You may connect well, but they are already at their limit in terms of how many friendships they can maintain.
- Ask questions about them. Genuinely listen. Look for common ground.
 - Your goal isn't to be an interrogator. Instead, you want to show that you care and are curious about them.
 - If you are at an exercise class, then you may start by asking a question like "This class wore me out! How about you?"
- Brainstorm places to meet people by imagining where your best friend would want to hang out. Go there.
 - I'm a bookworm, so I would be heading out to the library or looking to join a book club. (I organized my own!)
- Don't rush into the "best friend zone."
 - Friendships take time. It's better to allow them to develop over time than rush the relationship along before you've had a chance to really get to know the person.
 - In your loneliness, you may feel compelled to overshare. Resist the urge and set your limits beforehand (e.g., "I'm not talking about my marital separation tonight).
- Invite a work friend to hang out. Set the boundary ahead of time to avoid talking about work.
 - You can unwittingly make your friendship be based mostly on your job as your only common ground. If either of you changes jobs, then it's harder for the friendship to survive the transition.



More Friendship Tips

- Join a group that will have people similar to you and in a similar phase of life.
 - Book clubs, hiking groups, kickball teams, support groups, parent groups, and religious communities are some examples.
 - Odds are good that you will sniff out some people looking for friends, too.
 - After a couple of meet-ups, set a goal to invite a few people to lunch. I know...it feels like a date. The awkwardness is worth the potential for a good friend.
 - Many of my friends have kids around the same age as my own. We are in a similar phase of life and can have our kids play together while we chat (about our kids). ;)
- Say "yes" when people invite you to hang out.
 - Unless there are obvious red flags, opt into opportunities for building connections.
 - You aren't committing to a long-term friendship. You are just agreeing to go out for coffee.
 - You may be surprised by the commonalities you find. Again, you aren't just looking for one best friend but a friendship community.



- Be willing to be the planner.
 - People frequently assume that everyone is busy but them, talking themselves out of inviting people to hang out.
 - One of my friends puts together a monthly "Mom night" dinner. Anyone can invite anyone who needs some time out of the house...whether or not they are actually a mom. A little leg work goes a long way.
- Be consistent. Try to follow through on your social commitments.
 - People will stop inviting you if you routinely cancel with no good reason. Why? They assume you don't really want to hang out.
 - If you have a barrier that forces you to be inconsistent (e.g., a medical condition), then consider how to disclose enough about your situation for them to show you their capacity for compassion and flexibility.
- Give people second chances, unless there are obvious warning signs telling you not to.
 - See the explanation above!
 - Some people struggle to get past their anxiety. With some time, they will relax and be more themselves, too.
- Be patient! Let things take the time they take.



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