

How to Make (and Keep) Friends as an Adult

Source: [Sunlife](#)

Friendships play an important part of your health. But they can be difficult to make or maintain as an adult. Here's what you can do to improve your social skills.

Did making friends back in your school years seem easy? What about in the here and now?

You may find it more challenging to meet new people, and maintain those friendships, later in life. More Canadians than you might guess struggle with loneliness. Only 14% of Canadians feel their social lives are “very good,” according to a 2019 study conducted by the Angus Reid Institute, a non-profit research organization. And more than six in 10 Canadians wished their family and friends spent more time with them.

But the challenge of making new friends is worth it. Not only do great friends boost your self-esteem, but they can also help you live healthier, too. Loneliness can up your risk of heart disease and stroke, and even rivals smoking and obesity for its risk on your health, explains the Mayo Clinic.

What's more, finding new friends may be less nerve-wracking than you think. Take these steps to meet new people, then turn casual acquaintances into friends.

1. Build your confidence

When you feel lonely, it can feel tempting to blame yourself. But, as Toronto-based psychotherapist Lisa M. Kelly explains, many of us find it challenging to make friends in adulthood. “Increasing demands at work or home often mean less time for friendship,” she says. “And relocation could mean starting over almost entirely.”

In short, your currently-less-than-satisfying social life is not a reflection of you. And boosting your self-esteem can make it easier to find potential friends. “Remember that because you've made friends in the past, you can make friends again,” Kelly says. “Remind yourself of your strengths and lovable qualities, and you just might radiate warm, positive energy that others will be drawn to.”

Of course, if you need help building your confidence, your existing friends or family can help. There are plenty of reasons they love you. So reach out for a pep talk when you need one.

2. Use your daily routine to improve your social life

The best friendships often grow out of shared values or interests. So look to your passions for ways to find friends. Is fitness front and centre in your life? A new socially distanced running group or virtual group fitness class may help you meet new people. Focused on growing your career? Try joining virtual networking events to benefit your career and boost your social life. Virtual book clubs and other hobby-based virtual events can also offer great opportunities to meet like-minded potential friends.

3. Get better at small talk

Do you feel nervous making small talk? Don't fret. Your earliest conversations with your friends don't have to be about the weather. Try these thought starters to get to know new potential friends.

- Ask open-ended questions: "How did this group start?"
- Listen carefully and paraphrase: "It sounds like you enjoy a well-written autobiography."
- Give a compliment: "I liked your question – particularly the way you worded it."
- Offer (or ask for) help: "Your arms are full – could I carry your coffee for you?" or "What have you been reading lately?"
- Share something about yourself: "This is my first time at an event like this since moving here."

Taking the lead in the conversation can help soothe everyone's nerves. And as you build a rapport with your new potential friends, the conversation will come easily.

4. Keep reaching out to people

Try reaching out to old, new, and potential friends consistently, as long as there's reciprocity. This could be as simple as giving them a quick text, phone call, or zoom call to say hello and ask them what's new. Remember, during this pandemic it is important to remain socially available, even though we can't be physically available. And try to be flexible. Some of your new friends might stay casual acquaintances, while others might become best friends. You'll find the mix of friends that's right for you.

5. Get help when you need it

Making friends may feel easier for some people than others. And underlying health issues, like anxiety or depression, can also make meeting new people more challenging. If you're struggling, consider reaching out to a mental health professional for help.

Mental health experts like therapists or psychiatrists can help you:

- Explore your particular challenges in making friends,
- Learn how to deepen and maintain friendships, and
- Find strategies that work for you, so that making friends comes more naturally.