

Starting New Friendships

Making new friends can be challenging but worthwhile – especially if your social network is too small for your liking. But how do you meet new people? You could just walk down the street and start talking to people, but that probably wouldn't work. In fact, we could go so far as to say "*There is no way to meet new people!*" As long as you are focused exclusively on meeting people, it won't work.

So how do you do it? Acknowledge your desire to meet people. Then *let go* of that desire and think about what else you like to do. Then do that activity in a way that puts you into contact with people.

Which interest? Look over your list of friends and try to remember how you met each one. Then think of the activities that you have enjoyed in the past or would like to try in the future. Is there any overlap between the two? Perhaps you met some of your best friends on a hiking trip and you would like to take up hiking again. Joining a hiking club will get you out and put you into contact with other people who share your interest.

Even if your favorite activities are solitary you can make them social. If you like reading you could join a reading group. If you like photography you could take a class. Here are some possibilities:

Community center activities
Sporting clubs
Night school courses
Social clubs at work
Volunteer work

Religious attendance
Health clubs, gyms
Political groups
Social action groups
Parties/events held by friends

Think about your own situation and interests. How could you do something you like in a way that would put you in contact with new people?

What if you want a partner or a best friend?

The closer the relationship, the fewer the possibilities. There may be only one in a thousand people you would want for a best friend, whereas you might be satisfied to have almost anyone for a casual acquaintance. Consequently, if your social life is too narrow, it is generally best to *look for acquaintances first*. Once you get to know them, some acquaintances will become friends, and some of those may become *close* friends. You can also meet people through your acquaintances. This will increase your chances of finding a best friend or a partner.

Here are some more tips on meeting new people. Place a check mark by the ones you think may be useful for you to remember.

- _____ **Take an active role.** Don't always wait for others to introduce themselves or break the ice. Mingle at parties and events. Have a few things in mind that you could talk about.
- _____ **Consider your safety.** Women on their own may need to take special care. Is this a setting that is safe for you to talk to strangers? Are there other people nearby?
- _____ **Be yourself.** You don't have to hide your true nature or be unusually clever or charming. Remind yourself that people respond better to warmth and genuineness than to attempts to impress.
- _____ **Limit your expectations.** Your goal should be to talk with a new person, not to find a soul-mate. Most of the people you meet won't become close friends, so avoid hoping for too much.
- _____ **Build your confidence.** Remind yourself that you are in control of the situation. If you don't like what is happening, you can always end the conversation.
- _____ **Ask questions.** People who ask about the other person are often felt to be the best conversationalists. It's also much easier than carrying the conversation all on your own.
- _____ **Permit awkwardness.** Meeting new people is difficult. Accept this and try not to put yourself down if you stumble. Everyone looks awkward occasionally.
- _____ **Reward yourself.** Once you have spoken to someone new, dwell on the fact that you have accomplished something that is difficult for most people. Give yourself credit for your efforts.

If meeting new people is a priority for you, take a moment to define what your first few steps will be. Remember to make these steps clear, specific, and achievable.
