

Making friends - Fall '22

Going to college, especially if it is in a new city, brings many opportunities to learn and try new things, see new places and make new friends from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. This can be an exciting time of personal growth. However, making new friends can be scary, especially if none of your old school friends are with you. It can also be a lonely time before your social network is established.

Friends, friends, friends...

Loneliness means having no one to confide in during rough times. Without friends, it's easier to feel bad about yourself and to feel as if your problems are insurmountable. Added to that is the fear that "there is something wrong with me if I don't have friends." Friends provide status, support, fun, ideas, and much more - no wonder people want friends! They are often our first source of practical help, advice, and information. Having more than one friend shares the load so that you don't feel you're bothering someone with all your problems. Also, they may not be available when you need them most.

How we make things worse

It is easy to assume everyone else has friends, especially if you see them surrounded by people at social gatherings.

Starting new friendships involves taking a risk—risking rejection. If someone isn't interested in making friends with you beyond an acquaintance level it's not necessarily a judgment about you. They may already have some friends and not feel the need or have the time to develop new friends. We also get along with people similar to ourselves; you may not be their type or they may not be yours. It is easy to fall prey to negative self-talk, such as "there's something wrong with me," or "I'm the only one who feels like this."

It may feel a little awkward at first to make the step from greeting someone in class to inviting them for a coffee or to meet for lunch, but if you take the risk you may be rewarded by friendship. Turning a chance encounter into a friendship takes time, and can't be rushed. Remember the courage it took to make friends in grade school, middle school, and high school? If you've done it before you can do it again. Be patient, and don't jump to critical conclusions about yourself.

Making new friends - first steps

This requires a few key social skills that can be learned - assertiveness is helpful.

- Remind yourself that anyone in a new environment goes through an adjustment phase and in time you will make friends.
- Resist the urge to withdraw from people, don't isolate yourself.
- Practice your social skills by making a daily effort to always sit beside someone in lectures, in the dining halls, in the library, in the yellow and blue Adirondack chairs, and say hello to them, and get involved in discussions.
- See your early attempts to talk to people as just a "practice session." This will make their response less of an issue. You'll be less anxious and more your natural self.
- Remember to be a friend to yourself first. Make a commitment to be a friend to yourself first and foremost. See this as something you are doing to meet your needs and take care of yourself.
 - Relax alone, and become comfortable with yourself. Find your balance between solitude and socializing. This will help you be your natural self rather than coming across as needy or desperate.
- Get involved in sports, music, art, religion, organizations, or clubs on campus - these are great places to meet people; these opportunities provide a natural icebreaker to overcome any initial awkwardness.

Deeper friendships - next steps

Remember to take time to understand yourself. For example, if you are naturally an introvert or shy person you may do things very differently from the person down the hall that is an extrovert. They may always seem to be surrounded by others who seem to be laughing and joking. You may find it easier to get to know people slowly one-on-one. If you think about it you may actually prefer to have a few quiet, serious friends, rather than a lot of talkative ones. Introverted people can find it isolating if they do not fit into the drinking and loud partying culture which can be dominated by extroverts. Finding other people to have a meaningful conversation with can be a struggle if you are looking for friends in places where you do not feel comfortable. So try a club or organization here on campus.

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and for Clubs and Organizations



Try listening first and talking later. Most people are happy to talk about films they have seen, books they have read, hobbies they like, assignments, politics, events on campus, sports, or even the weather. These topics provide important bridges to more important interesting stuff.

Remember to talk about your feelings and experiences a little too, so that others start to get a sense of who you are. Be positive, enthusiastic, thoughtful, and encouraging in your support and acceptance of them. Ask open questions such as "what did you think of that test" ... rather than questions requiring only a yes or no answer. Remember that building friendships takes time.

Try and make friends of all genders and be clear about the nature of your friendships while recognizing the boundaries that distinguish a friendship from an intimate relationship. You do not have to be in an intimate or romantic relationship to meet your needs for friendship and belonging.

Friends are great in themselves and they form a vital part of your personal support network. They can throw you a lifeline when you feel like you are homesick, excited, or when in a crisis. Taking the time to make friends is part of taking care of yourself, and it gives you the opportunity to be a support to others when they are in need (and that can feel pretty good too!) Remember to be aware of your good points - find them so that you can encourage others to do the same.

Where do I go from here?

You can find out more about developing friendships at The Counseling and Personal Development Center, the Spiritual and Religious Life Office, Residence Life, your RA, the Center for Student Success, your hallmates, and/or clubs and organizations around campus.



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