

Six Simple Tips for Making Friends

Loneliness is frequently described in terms of a modern pandemic. A growing body of [research](#) indicates loneliness may be worse for your health than obesity or heavy smoking.

While most people agree that loneliness is a problem, there's far less consensus on what to do about it. Modern loneliness has a wide variety of causes. It also manifests itself quite differently in different demographics.

I know what it's like to be lonely. I've moved to three different countries in the last five years. Each time, I started with zero friends and had to build a social life from nothing. On the balance, I think I've done fairly well. I made a few true friends in every place I've lived. Here are six things I have learned along the way.

Let me preface by saying this: making friends is not always easy, and sometimes the process won't be much fun. But the alternative is loneliness and that's far worse.

1. Define Your Goals

Give some thought to what your ideal social life would look like. What would it take for you not to feel lonely? Then grab a pen and paper and write it down. Be as specific as possible. Just writing "I want to have friends" is too nebulous. A much better goal would be something like: "I want to meet with a friend in person at least once a week and have electronic contact with friends three times a week." That's easy to benchmark. If you start to feel lonely, you can check whether you've met your goal for that week. No? Ok, then it's time to issue some invitations and send some texts.

2. Get Proactive

When you think back on the friends you made in childhood and

college, it probably seems like they magically appeared in your life. You can't define how or when they became your friends. Sadly, once we enter adulthood, those kinds of friendships are mostly over. Friends will not come to you. You have to go out there and find them. Acknowledging this fact is a critical step toward overcoming loneliness.

I recommend that you start by brainstorming a list of people you've met in recent months (at church, via mutual friends, on your sports team, etc.) who have potential to become your friends. Then grab your phone and reach out to every one of them. I did this a few months after I moved to my current home in Brazil, and it was very effective. My first list had six names. And I keep coming back to that list, adding new names of people I've met and crossing off ones that didn't work out.

3. Make Your Social Media Accounts Work for You

Social media inevitably gets blamed in any discussion of modern loneliness. Yes, if you're spending all your time looking at perfect photos of people you barely know, you'll be lonely. Obviously. But social media can also be a powerful tool to connect you with new friends. I recommend that you hide the profiles of people you who don't play any role in your current life. You know who I'm talking about—that friend from middle school you haven't seen in 20 years. You need to configure your accounts so that when you log in the first thing you see is people you interact with regularly and groups that contain potential friends.

4. Embrace Your Limitations

I live in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and my Portuguese is only intermediate. That means I am currently limited to making friends with people who speak English. I could let that condemn me to a life of loneliness. Or I could embrace it as a useful filtering mechanism. The population of Sao Paulo is 12 million. 12 million. There is no way I could reach out to every single person in this city to see if they might become

my friend. When I only look at people who speak English, life gets much simpler.

You probably don't live in a city as big as Sao Paulo. But—given the reality of modern urban society—it's likely that you have *too many* potential friends instead of too few. What are your limitations? Maybe you work Saturdays. Maybe your family situation takes up most of your free time. Don't let that be an excuse for loneliness. Rather, embrace it. You can only form friendships with people who fit into the way your life works right now. That's a great way to narrow down your pool of potential friends.

5. Grow a Thick Skin

Reaching out to people also means sometimes they will reject you. It's the least pleasant part of trying to build a social life, but it's unavoidable. You need to grow a thick skin.

When someone doesn't want to be your friend, it's worth taking a minute to honestly ask yourself if you engaged in some obnoxious behavior that drove them away. But don't take longer than a minute. Friendships fail to launch for all sorts of reasons – many of which have nothing to do with you. And the busier you are reaching out to potential new friends, the less hurt you'll feel when the occasional rejection comes along.

6. Use What You've Learned

When people look at you, can they tell you're lonely? I'm guessing you work very hard to ensure they don't. But you've experienced what it's like to reach out to people, hoping for friendship. Use that knowledge. Look around and see who else might be lonely. Who is new to town? Who is a bit shy? If we all stopped being so self-absorbed and really looked at the people around us, loneliness would be a much smaller problem than it is.

What other tips do you have for making friends?

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