

INTERMEDIATE

How to make friends?



By Tom Viren

Be yourself, or be true to yourself. A true friend will like you for who you are, not who you pretend to be.

Spend more time around people. If you want to make friends, you first need to put yourself out there somehow in order to meet people. Friends seldom come knocking on your door while you sit at home playing computer games.

Talk to people. You can join a club, go to school, or go to church but you still won't make friends if you don't actually talk to people. By the same token, you don't have to be involved with an organization to be social, and any time you talk to someone, you have a chance at making a lasting friend. You can talk to anybody: the clerk at the video store, the person sitting next to you on the bus, or the person in front of you on the lunch line. Don't be too picky. Most conversations will be a dead-end of sorts--when you may never talk to that person again, or you just remain acquaintances--but once in a while you'll actually make a friend.

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Volunteer. Volunteering is a great way for people of all ages to meet others. By working together you build bonds with people, and you might meet others who have a passion for changing things the way you do—a common cause.

Make eye contact and smile. If you have an unfriendly countenance, people are less likely to be receptive to your friendship. Be approachable by not squinting (get some glasses), frowning or appearing blankly deadpan, such expressions may look troubled or disinterested.

Start a conversation. There are many ways to do this; a comment about your immediate environment (The weather is a classic: "At least it's not raining like last week!"), a request for help ("Can you help me carry a few boxes, if you have a minute?" or "Can you help me decide which one of these is a better gift for my mom?") or a compliment ("That's a nice car." or "I love your shoes."). Follow up immediately with a related question: Do you like this warm weather? What kinds of gifts do you normally buy for your mom? Where did you get shoes like that?

Make small talk. Keep the conversation light and cheery. Even if you're complaining about something, make sure it's something you're both dissatisfied with, and emphasize the positive—how such a situation can be avoided in the future, or alternatives. Bounce a few words back and forth for a little bit. Many conversationalists say that it is good to follow a 30/70 (30% talking, 70% listening) pattern during small talk when possible.

Introduce yourself at the end of the conversation. It can be as simple as saying "Oh, by the way, my name is...". Once you introduce yourself, the other person will typically do the same. Remember his or her name! If you show that you remembered things from your past conversation(s) with the person, not only will you look intelligent but he or she will see that you were paying attention and are willing to be a true friend.

Initiate a get-together. You can chat your heart out but it won't get you a friend if you don't open up the opportunity for another conversation or meeting. This is especially important if you meet someone who you aren't otherwise likely to meet again. Seize the day!