

# Being Shy and Making Friends

All of us know one or two people capable of making friends with a lamp post. It seems that no matter where they go, they end up with a throng of new friends they can't wait to hang out with. On the other hand, you find making friends a lot like pulling teeth. You are so shy that most attempts to socialise make you uncomfortable.

This post is designed to help you understand how to make friends despite being shy. However, please understand that shyness and social anxiety are two different things. Shyness is an emotional response to unfamiliar situations that gradually subsides as you become more comfortable. Social anxiety is a phobia that prevents you from being social altogether.

If you are suffering from social anxiety, the best thing you can do is seek treatment from a mental health professional. Assuming you are just shy rather than socially anxious, there are some basic principles you can adopt to help yourself make new friends.

## Practice Makes Perfect

There is an old saying that practice makes perfect. It is true in sports; it is true in art; it is true in just about every area of life requiring any measure of skill. Here is the thing many people do not understand about making friends: it is a skill. Some people are born with the skill while others have to learn it. Either way, it is a skill that requires practice.

The first step in overcoming your shyness is to get out there and practice being social. You don't have to throw yourself into full-blown social situations right away, though. You can start out small by hanging out with two or three people in a casual setting. The more times you do this sort of thing, the better you will get at it.

## Practice Being a Listener

One of the fundamental characteristics of being a friend is learning to listen. So many of us feel like we have to contribute to conversations that we don't know when to stop talking. But if we never stop talking, we aren't taking the time to listen. That's no way to build trust among friends.

You can help yourself make new friends by practising being a good listener. As an added benefit, learning to listen means you'll have to do less of the talking. You might find that this makes you more comfortable more quickly.

## Choose Good Conversational Topics

Psychiatry classifies shyness as a kind of fear, mild as it might be. What are shy people most afraid of? What others think of them. So they guard their conversations and their emotions accordingly. As a shy person, you can work through this by engaging in good conversation. The key here is to choose good topics.

A good topic doesn't force you to reveal intimate information unless you want to. It is a topic that keeps

the conversation sociable and engaging. It has been said that if you can always have two or three good stories to tell, you'll never have trouble being part of the conversation.

## **Don't Try so Hard**

We will wrap up this post with one final suggestion that ties everything up in a nice package: don't try so hard. Any shyness you might experience could be made worse if you allow yourself to obsess over being perfect in social situations.

Look, we are all socially awkward to one extent or another. Those who don't seem socially awkward have really just learned to not take things so seriously. Just relax and be yourself. You will find that people like you just the way you are.

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