

How To Grow And Deepen New Friendships

In one of the site's central articles I go over a basic structure for [how to make new friends](#). It focuses on the beginning stages of meeting some people and starting to hang out with them. Some readers say they get stuck at this point. They're okay about finding some new acquaintances, but aren't sure how to take things farther than that. Here I'll talk about some general guidelines for taking a new friendship to a deeper level.

The concepts I'll describe below often happen automatically as a friendship progresses, but you can take more control of your social life by deliberately trying to use them. They mainly apply to individual friends, but some of them also carry over to becoming tighter with a group of people. First, some things to keep in mind:

There's no formula to become better friends with everybody you meet

Not everyone we meet is going to want to hang out with us. And definitely not everyone we hang out with is going to become a closer friend. We're just not compatible with most people in terms of interests, values, what they're looking for in a friendship, availability, and a dozen other things. So while you can try to apply the ideas below to your new friends, realize they're not all going to go the distance and become your soul mates. That's okay though, since you may still be able to enjoy their company on a more casual level.

On the same note, just because you may be able to successfully apply one or more of the ideas below on someone, that won't guarantee the friendship is going to go anywhere. Like you may have a single really intimate conversation with someone, but overall they'll continue to think of you as someone they run into every now and then. You could say many of the principles below are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for a relationship becoming deeper.

Overall, if you're making an effort to become better friends with someone, and you get the sense you're putting more energy into it than they are, consider backing off and adjusting your expectations.

Sometimes we'll become good friends with someone pretty quickly, at other times it takes a while

Many people have had the experience of meeting someone new and immediately starting to hang out with them all the time. Just as many can point to a very good friend of theirs where the bond grew a lot more gradually. Neither way is better than the other. I think friendships can get off the ground quickly when:

- For whatever reason you just click with that person unusually well.
- When you're both at a place in your lives where you're looking for new friends to spend time with (e.g., how social circles come together really quickly during the first weeks of college).
- When you're both available and easily accessible to each other (e.g., you live in the same building and have lots of free time to hang out together).
- When you fulfill an unmet need in each other's lives (e.g., you absolutely love movies, but none of your other friends care much about them. Then you meet someone who's also a huge movie buff, who you can talk about films with for hours; You're the only person in your group of friends who's still single and wants to go out on the weekends. Then you meet someone who's also up for the same thing).

- You're in a situation where the usual standards for friendship progression don't apply, like when you meet people while traveling and feel like friends for life after only knowing them for six days.

Friendships can grow more slowly when:

- One or both of you are pretty busy with your day-to-day lives and/or already have many friends who fill up your calendar. You just don't have time to hang out constantly.
- You get along well, but there isn't that instant spark of intense compatibility. You'll become closer sooner or later, but it's not going to happen in a week.
- You're not actively trying to grow a friendship with someone. For example, they're just in your social circle, and you get to know them better in little snatches here and there as you hang out with all your other friends. Eventually, even if it wasn't your intention from the start, your relationship with them may start to stand out as a deeper one.

It's natural to feel a bit awkward and insecure as a new friendship begins

There are the times when we hit it off with someone right away and never feel uncomfortable around them. There are also those times where our friendships develop in a low stakes, almost accidental way, from our interactions with our co-workers or friends of friends. However, often enough the process is more nerve racking, like if you meet someone at a one-off event and then actively try to start a friendship with them. Here it's understandable that things will feel shaky. You're not sure if they really like you, or if things will go anywhere. You may hesitate to invite them out, because they may turn you down. Before you get together with them you might worry that the conversation could be strained and awkward. If you meet their friends you anxiously wonder if you'll be get along with them, or be able to keep up with their antics. It usually takes a month or two before you start to feel more relaxed and secure about the relationship.

Ways to develop a new friendship

Here are the actual suggestions on how to become better friends with someone. Every friendship is different and not every point will apply to every type equally. Some are more about sharing and connecting, while others are based around shared hobbies and joking around.

Just spend more time together

I'll break this down further soon, but simply spending more time with someone is the backbone of becoming better friends with them. A close relationship isn't something that happens in a few hours. You need time to get to know the other person, have fun together, and become more comfortable with each other. You need time for all the relationship-enhancing things I mention below to happen. Additionally, it usually takes a while before we start thinking of someone as a friend, and not someone they recently met and who we seem to be getting along with. If you don't see a new friend enough, things won't really get off the ground. Everyone can probably recall a time where they met someone they liked, but the budding friendship petered out because they hardly saw each other after that.

Time is an important enough factor that we often naturally become better friends with the people our lives put us into a lot of contact with. We form relationships with our co-workers, friends of friends, classmates, and team members. With time friendships can even develop between people who were pretty neutral towards or uninterested in each other at first. It

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won't happen with everyone, but sometimes we'll meet someone we think we could take or leave, but as we get to know them they'll grow on us.

Even in the absence of everything else, time alone has some power to bond people. After we've known someone for long enough, provided we don't totally hate them, we can't help but see the relationship as stronger (e.g., "Natasha and I did our whole undergrads together"). Similarly, if someone is in our social circle for a while, but we were never especially close to them, we still tend to see them as a member of the tribe.

Make an effort to hang out with the other person pretty regularly

The main way to ensure we spend enough time with someone is to try to hang out with them fairly often. As I said, often we'll be in a situation where we'll automatically put in those hours. If not, you should take the initiative to propose get togethers and continue seeing them. Several other articles on the site discuss making plans with people. Some of them are:

This process will play out at different speeds depending on the person. With some you'll quickly fall into a routine of hanging out often. With others you may only be able to get together every two weeks for a quick bite to eat. This step is ongoing. It's not about coordinating a hang out with someone once. It's about keeping up the effort to keep seeing them continuously over a period of months. Some people have trouble with this step, for several reasons:

- They're just a bit too busy or lazy, and don't put in the work to see with their new friends regularly.
- They're [shy](#) and reluctant to invite someone to hang out, because they fear they'll be rejected. This most often comes up during the first few invites, but may more subtly affect their actions later on as well.
- They're insecure, and prone to thinking they're not worth hanging around, and that their new friends must not really like them. At any point they may give up and stop trying, based on what they 'know'.
- They don't have the highest need to socialize, [which is fine](#), but it causes them to not initiate get togethers as often as is needed to keep the new friendship going.

Spend enough one-on-one time talking with them

There are plenty of ways people can get to know each other and bond in a group setting. That's a lot better than nothing, but often the real opportunities to connect come up when it's just you and the other person talking. Also, if you haven't experienced that you can hang out with someone on your own, how good of friends can you really consider yourselves? Some people will have known someone mainly through group outings, but saw a different side of them when they started hanging out with just the two of them, and will point to that as when their friendship really started to develop.

Most obviously, one-on-one time could consist of arranging to do something with the person separately. It could also consist of having time to break off with them from a larger group. For example, at a party you and they may be able to retreat to the backyard to talk.

I mentioned earlier about how people can feel anxious at first when they hang out with new friends. For some, this goes double when it comes to one-on-one outings. They feel more pressured and on the spot. The best way to get over this is to just [face your fear](#) of the situation and get used to it.

Get away from the formal structure of classes, clubs, and teams

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There are still lots of ways to connect with people when you're seeing them through regular, scheduled meetings. However, this can sometimes lead to a kind of complacency, and a false sense that the relationships are stronger than they are, when they're really just being held in place by the routine of it all. Making an effort to hang out with people outside of the regular meeting times takes the friendship to another level. You start to see each other has having a real relationship, and not just as them being someone you have a nice time chatting to at that place you'd go to anyway.

Keep up with them in between hanging out

One thing that separates closer friends from more casual ones is how much they stay in contact outside of when they meet in person. Good friends will keep in touch. More casual buddies think more along the lines of, "I'll be happy to see them when we run into each other in person, but I don't need to keep up with them otherwise."

Especially if you're not hanging out with them all the time, keep up with your new friends in between get togethers. Send them texts making a joke, or asking if they saw the latest episode of a show you both watch, or ask them how their week went. Write on their Facebook wall or send them a link they may like. Give them a call to catch up.

You may be wondering how often you should try to keep in touch, and that you don't want to overdo it and be needy. Take their response rate, and their own contacts to you, as a gauge to how often you should drop them a line. Some people are chatty and are happy to text back and forth with you all day. Others are more of a weekly text type. Of course, once you've established a certain level of friendship, you can often get away with going weeks at a time without talking, and always pick up where you left off. However, you'll only tend to maintain the relationship this way, not actively grow it.

The problems I listed as hindering someone's ability to hang out with a friend regularly - laziness, shyness, insecurity, fear of rejection - can also crop up when it comes to keeping in touch. For example, someone may be writing a Facebook comment and then think, "Ah, I'm probably just bugging her. She doesn't want to hear from me."

If you do go a while without talking to someone, it's usually not a big deal. You can still get back in touch and catch up. It's not even that awkward. Things tend to pick up where they left off. Don't think you automatically have to throw the friendship away.

Be a good friend in all the usual ways

This point is really important, but it's a broad concept that's hard to sum up in a few paragraphs. A friendship will grow closer if each person comes to see the other as someone they can count on, and who won't screw them over or make them feel bad about themselves. That means showing the standard traits of a good friend. Of course, I can't cover every trait or behavior that aids or harms human relationships, but I'm referring to things like:

- Generally showing that you like them and want to hang out with them.
- Being positive and fun to hang around with.
- Being dependable.
- Being emotionally supportive.
- Being willing to go out of your way for them.
- Not gossiping about them behind their back.

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- Not blabbing to everyone about things they told you in confidence.
- Not using them or taking them for granted.
- Not freaking out at them over little things, or taking out your frustrations on them.
- Showing good character in general. You can act awesome around one person, but if they hear that you're a scumbag otherwise, they may not want anything to do with you.

You don't have to be absolutely perfect. No one is, or expects their buddies to be either. Also, each person has a different mix of traits they think are important, or flaws they're willing to overlook. It's about finding the right matches for you. For example, one person may primarily look for someone who's fun to go out with, and not care if they're unreliable. Another may see flakiness as disrespectful and a deal breaker, and put a premium on someone who will be honest with them, and keep their secrets.

Of course, just being a decent person alone won't guarantee someone will want to become closer friends with you. It's not like you show you're, say, respectful of their opinions and they're now obligated to want to hang out with you all the time. Sometimes we'll act like a good friend to someone and they won't care what we're doing, or even take advantage of it.

Just have a good time together when you hang out

This one is straightforward. What a good time entails depends on what the other person is looking for. For one person it may mean a really stimulating intellectual conversation. For another it may mean being able to go trap shooting for an afternoon. Someone else may want a shopping or drinking buddy. You can take steps to grow a relationship by going out of your way to do things you know your new friend will enjoy. You don't have to do something incredibly novel each time, but on the other hand, don't fall into a rut where all you ever do is sit around and be bored.

People can go wrong on this point if they're not a good fit for their friend in terms of what each of your ideas of 'fun' is. Also, the odd person may have trouble [being fun in general](#), or have too limited a range of interests and activities they can take part in with others.

Open up to each other

People see their relationships as deeper and more rewarding when they can talk to each other about more weighty or personal topics, things they can't bring up with just anyone. It also feels good to know you've shown someone pieces of your real self, and they accept you for it. Sure, not every friendship has to include tons of sharing and self-disclosure. People can bond and feel close to each other for other reasons. However, even the friendships that seem more surface level likely have more sharing than it seems, even if the people in them don't think of it that way.

A gauge of whether something is a weightier topic is whether you feel cautious or vulnerable about sharing it. This varies from person to person. For example, one person may have no problem talking to anyone about her sex life, but be guarded about discussing her family. Someone else could be the opposite. Some socially awkward people are [overly guarded](#), because they feel they'll be rejected if they reveal their flawed selves to anyone. With new friends there will be areas you'll have no problem talking about right away, while someone else would hold that stuff close to their chest. The friendship will grow closer when you feel safe bringing up the issue that are more sensitive for you.

In terms of controllable, actionable suggestions, this means that with time you should consciously try to steer the conversation to deeper territory if it isn't heading that way on its

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own. Of course you don't have to reveal your darkest flaws and secrets right away. Push your comfort zone and start out with things that make you mildly uneasy to share. Often once you do it, you'll likely realize it's not as bad as you thought it would be. If your new friend makes you feel accepted and understood in response, then share more down the road. If not, then you'll know you've hit a limit on how far the relationship will go. Secondly, don't shy away if the other person brings up deeper topics themselves. You don't necessarily have to reveal exactly as much as them at that moment, but at least give something in return.

Connect with each other over commonalities

This one is often a side effect of opening up to each other. You can't totally control it, but it really helps when it happens. One thing that makes a friendship stronger is when you both realize you share something in common, something you can't find in most people, and feel an increased sense of connection and being understood because of that. A handful of examples are:

- You both really love cars and can talk to each other about technical stuff that flies over other people's heads.
- You share the same warped sense of humor, which none of your other friends get.
- You both have the dream of being novelists, while everyone else you both know thinks the idea is unrealistic.
- You're both in the same profession, and can talk-shop and know the unique challenges of the field, while your friends are in totally unrelated occupations.
- You both fervently follow the same TV series, and are the only ones in your social circle who seem to care about it.
- You have identical, non-mainstream views on religion.
- You both grew up with alcoholic mothers, and have had eerily similar childhoods, and challenges as adults.

Have some adventures or crazy times together

Another thing that increases a feeling that you have a strong relationship with someone is the sense that you have a shared history. Even better is a history with some truly memorable experiences. It gives you that ability to say, "Remember the time when we...?" Many people have memories of viewing someone, or a group of people, as casual friends, but then they took that one camping trip together, and after that they started to see each other as a tight knit group. An 'adventure' just has to be some sort of excursion that's fun and out of the ordinary. It doesn't necessarily have to be a ridiculous drunken night if that's not your style. It could be something like making road trip with someone to go to a music festival or a national park.

Be there for them during challenging times

One more factor that bonds people is when one of them helps the other. They can look back over the relationship and be able to think, "We're pretty close. We've helped each other through rough patches." As I've said already about another point, this isn't a guarantee you'll grow closer, and you could even come to feel used and unappreciated, but if the friendship otherwise seems to be going in a good direction, it can be worth the risk. Helping someone could be as simple as offering to give them a ride to the mechanic to pick up their

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car, or lending them a book they can use as a source while writing a paper, or letting them vent over something inconsiderate their mom did. You don't always have to sign up to support them through a relative's illness for eleven months or anything.

Go through a difficult experience together

You can't really control this one either, but people tend to bond when they go through a challenge together. I think it connects people for its own sake, but along the way you're also probably spending time together, and having to shore each other up. The easiest examples are how people can grow really close as they're going through a demanding degree, job, or internship. The ultimate example probably is when people go to war together.