



BEING SOCIAL AS AN AUTISTIC ADULT

Are you lonely? Bored? Wishing you had someone to do something with? If so, you're not the only one. Many people feel this way at one time or another. If you are on the autism spectrum, you may worry that being alone is how it's going to be. But you don't have to be isolated. It may not be easy, but if you are willing to put forth some effort, you can meet new people and develop new friendships.

How to Meet People

Many people find it's easiest to meet people when circumstances bring them together. Shared experience gives people something to talk about. Also, if you are in the same place, there is an increased likelihood that you will have something in common – maybe it's where you live or work, an activity you enjoy, or a favorite place to eat (don't eat at a booth alone if you want to meet someone; sit at the bar where others will be next to you and perhaps also on their own).

Maybe you're lonely because you are hanging out at home, pursuing your own solitary interests. While you can interact with people on-line, this isn't the same as face to face interactions. Start by identifying activities you enjoy or are interested in trying. If you are a gamer, go to a gaming convention or to the local video game store. Like reading history? Volunteer at the local historic attraction or museum. Do you have a special talent that others envy? Offer to teach others how to do it – either as a one-on-one tutor or in a small group. If “neurotypicals” make you leery, consider joining a group designed for autistic individuals or a general disability organization. Many of these groups have social outings planned by the members themselves.

Make sure to pick an environment that you can handle. If you are sensory sensitive to light or don't like crowds, make sure the activity you choose takes these limitations into account. If the activity you choose tends to be crowded, consider coming early or staying late. This gives you the opportunity to interact with others

before the event gets hectic and overwhelming.

What's important is that you get involved. But "getting involved" doesn't just mean signing up and going. When you're there, you need to interact. Maybe you need time to adjust. That's fine. Join a group with regular meetings. This will allow you to see some of the same people over and over on a regular basis. It gives you and them time to get to get comfortable with each other. This way, you'll have more than five minutes to make an impression.

Don't get discouraged if your first attempt isn't successful. There are thousands of activities out there to choose from. If one isn't working, try something different.

Show You're Interested and Interesting

A good way to start a conversation is by making reference to something obvious that you and the other person have in common.

- To someone wearing a Miami Heat t-shirt: "I'm from Florida and love the Miami Heat. What makes you a fan?"
- To someone in the video game store: "I love Call of Duty®. What's your favorite game?"

If you are attending an activity or event alone, it can be daunting to go up to a stranger. Relax. You most likely won't be the only person there by yourself.

- Smile as you look around the room and try to find someone else standing alone or in a small group. (Most people find it easier to approach someone by themselves than a group of people.)
- Walk up to that person or group, make eye contact, and introduce yourself. Wait for them to respond and introduce themselves.
- Ask them if they are there for the event and mention that it is your first time trying something like this (or that you've done it before but in a different town, different venue, etc.).
- Ask them what made them decide to come to the event.
- Listen to the answer and respond appropriately.
- If the conversation starts to fall apart, it's okay to make an excuse like I'm going to grab a drink before things get started or I'm going to run to the bathroom. Head in the direction of your excuse and when you get back, look for another person or small group to approach. Or if things seem to be

going well, ask the person if they want to go with you to get some food before things get underway. This might give you something new to talk about.

- Remember, people who go to social events are there to be social. Everyone there wants to interact and is hoping to meet someone new and interesting.

Notice that in the above example, you would ask a lot of questions of the other person. This helps to show interest. But don't just fire off one question after the other. It is critical that you listen to what the other person has to say and respond appropriately. Nonsequiturs (saying things that don't naturally come after what preceded them) make you look uninterested in the other person or just out of touch. Also, try not to dominate the conversation. Everyone likes a chance to talk and be heard. Your new acquaintance is no exception. This may mean not going into great detail about your knowledge of train schedules or invertebrates. Try to keep the conversation centered on things you are likely to have in common. Finally, you don't have to agree with everything the person says, but avoid getting into heated debates. Discussing neutral and uncontroversial topics is a good rule to follow for a new acquaintance or developing friendship.

Don't Forget Personal Hygiene

Most people don't want to be around someone who smells bad, wears dirty clothes, or has teeth covered in plaque. This isn't because they are shallow; it's because being clean and neat shows that a person is responsible, conscientious, and takes pride in him or herself. Make sure when you are in public that you are freshly showered, wearing deodorant, and have an overall clean appearance. It's one thing to be sweaty if you are coming from the gym; it's another to walk around that way all day long. Also, check yourself after meals to make sure there's no barbecue sauce on your face or corn stuck in your teeth. And when it comes to eating in public, mind your mother! Slurping your food, licking your fingers, and shoveling food into your mouth as if you're in an eating competition is not polite and is no way to encourage conversation or a second meal with your companion!

Be Safe

In addition to being emotionally risky (everyone fears rejection), meeting new people also carries a safety concern. Unfortunately, there are people in the world

who will take advantage of others. Whenever meeting someone new, safety should be a top priority. Getting together in public spaces, like a restaurant or museum is a good idea when getting to know someone and developing a trusting bond. Additionally, as a friendship begins or as it continues, if something doesn't feel right, stop and think about what is making you pause. Is the person always borrowing money? Does the person only want to meet on his or her terms? Are you being pressured to do things you are not comfortable with? Talk to the other person about your discomfort. When necessary, seek the advice of other friends, family, or counselors to discuss your concerns and plan a way to proceed.

Related Articles:

- [Romance 101: Dating for Adults with ASD](#)
- [Why Social Relationships are Important for All Adults](#)

Additional Resources:

- [How to Meet New People Without Being Creepy \(written for the general population\)](#)
- [How to Meet People \(written for the general population\)](#)

The Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia do not endorse or recommend any specific person or organization or form of treatment. The information included within the CAR Autism Roadmap & trade; and CAR Resource Directory & trade; should not be considered medical advice and should serve only as a guide to resources publicly and privately available. Choosing a treatment, course of action, and/or a resource is a personal decision, which should take into account each individual's and family's particular circumstances.