MAKING FRIENDS IN RECOVERY:
A GUIDE TO FRIENDSHIP AS A SOBER ADULT
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Isolation and boredom are common relapse triggers and preventing these in recovery is central to success. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration cites community as one of the four major dimensions of recovery. Community is defined as having relationships and social networks that offer friendship, love, hope and support.

Recovery requires creating a new, sober social network even as you let go of old, unhealthy relationships that were based around using or other unhealthy behaviors. However, meeting a whole new group of friends is a daunting prospect, especially for adults in recovery who are still developing a non-using identity themselves.

Here, we offer some tips on where to meet new people, how to engage with them and what to do for sober fun.
HOW MANY FRIENDS DO ADULTS HAVE?
There is no magic number of friends you need for optimal physical and mental health, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. In general, introverts may have three or fewer intimate friends, while extroverts may have seven or more very close friendships. According to Robin Dunbar, professor of evolutionary psychology at the University of Oxford, the typical adult has three to five very close friends.
Dunbar is famous for coming up with Dunbar's number, which is the maximum number of people you can have a meaningful relationship with at any given time. Dunbar defines "meaningful relationships" as all of the people you wouldn't be embarrassed to approach if you bumped into them somewhere unexpected -you know who they are and where they fit in your social circle, and vice-versa.

Dunbar views the friend network like a series of concentric circles. In the bull's eye is the small group of three to five people you consider your most intimate friends, and they, along with your family, receive about 40 percent of your available social time. The next circle out contains about 10 people, who are considered "very good friends." Next come the 35 or so people you're "good" friends with, followed by the roughly 100 people you know and are cordial with. This adds up to about 150 people -Dunbar's number, which, as it turns out, is practically universal.

People in recovery may have to let go of a sizable portion of their social network, including current users, toxic friends and those who are unsupportive of their recovery. It can take some time to meet new friends, and attending meetings and staying busy will help ward off feelings of loneliness and isolation while you're developing a new social network.
WHERE TO MEET PEOPLE
In order to meet people, you have to "put yourself out there." Here are some great ways to meet people and expand your social network.

- **Try sober living.** A sober living home provides a high level of support in early recovery. You'll enjoy a built-in social and support network that can jumpstart your social life and lead to lifelong friendships.

- **Attend religious services.** Getting involved in a local faith institution can provide a broad and strong social support network in recovery. Attending services, joining committees and volunteering are surefire ways to get to know other like-minded individuals.

- **Engage with a support group.** A support group for people in recovery has numerous benefits for helping with sobriety. Most importantly, it gives the opportunity to get to know others who are also newly sober and looking for a new social network.

- **Join a club.** There's a club for just about every interest under the sun. Think about interests you have, and look for a group of like-minded people. Search online for clubs near you, or ask around. If you don't find one, consider starting your own.
- **Take a class.** Think of things you'd like to learn to do, and look for classes to take. You'll meet others with similar interests, and gain new skills while you're at it. Check with your local community college for credit and non-credit classes, or search online for classes near you.

- **Volunteer.** Volunteering is an excellent way to give back to the community, which research shows is a major boon to sobriety. Consider your strengths and interests, and look for opportunities to volunteer your time and get to know others in the community.

- **Use an app.** Apps like Meetup aim to bring together groups of people with common interests. You can find people in your area who are meeting up to play games, work out, go on a hike or hang out in a coffee shop. Whatever your interests, you can find others who share them.

- **Use social media.** Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter can help you get to know other people online, and you can use your online social networks to meet new people in your community and stay up-to-date on the happenings in your area.
♦ **Get to know your neighbors.** Getting to know your neighbors improves your sense of belonging in your neighborhood, and it could result in a good friend. Join your neighborhood association, and attend neighborhood meetings. Get to know the people who live around you by striking up friendly conversations and offering to help out when you can.

♦ **Take your dog to the park.** People love to discuss their pets, and going to the dog park affords numerous opportunities for striking up conversations and finding common ground. Get to know the regulars, and when you make a strong connection, schedule a doggie play date.

♦ **Have a party.** A sober social gathering is a great place to meet new friends. Invite the people you know, and invite everyone to bring a friend. You'll expand your social circle, and you'll give other newly sober people the chance to meet some new friends of their own.

♦ **Spend time at the gym.** Exercise is important in recovery, and the gym is one of those places where you can get to know other regulars pretty quickly. Join the local Y or other gym, and maintain a regular schedule of classes and workouts. You might find a workout buddy, which can lead to friendship outside the gym.

♦ **Go back to school.** Returning to school improves your financial outlook, and it can improve your social life, too. Get to know the other students in your program, and get involved in your school by joining a sports, service or academic club.
HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS
Meeting people requires good communication skills, which make a good first impression and improve your chances of clicking with someone. Here are some tips for talking to new people and getting to know them.

- **Make eye contact.** You don't have to engage in a staring contest, but make plenty of eye contact with the people you encounter. Making eye contact is a sign of self-confidence, and it makes you appear more interested and engaged in the conversation.

- **Be a good listener.** Balance talking with listening. When you're listening, give all of your attention to what the other person is saying.

- **Look for common ground.** When you strike up a conversation, begin to look for things you have in common with the other person. Finding common ground creates familiarity and gives you plenty to talk about.

- **Keep it light.** Making a meaningful connection with someone new is exciting, but resist the temptation to bare your soul. Keep it light and casual until you get to know the person better. Offering too much information too soon can turn people off.

- **Relax.** If meeting new people makes you nervous or anxious, take plenty of deep breaths to reduce your body's stress response and feel calmer. Focus on your breathing to help you quiet your brain, and release tension in your muscles. Smile, be yourself, and let the conversation unfold naturally.
WHAT TO DO FOR SOBER FUN
Once you've gotten to know someone and are ready to initiate a social meet-up, you may go blank wondering what to ask your new friend to do. Meeting for coffee is an obvious and popular choice, but having other options for sober fun helps keep things interesting, and many activities can take the pressure off having to keep the conversation rolling.

**Here, then, are some ideas for sober fun with your new crew.**

- **Take a hike.** Go on a hike at a local park or nearby recreation area. Hiking is good for the body and the soul, and it's a great way to bond with your friends.

- **See a movie.** Movies are a favorite activity for sober fun, and they provide numerous topics for conversation over coffee afterwards. Hit the local theater, or have a movie night at home with one or more pals.

- **Go to a festival.** A music, art, food or other festival is a great ice breaker and a good way to engage with your community. Look for small neighborhood festivals, city-sponsored events and local ethnic and cultural celebrations.

- **Hit the museums.** Museums are full of conversation topics, making them an ideal outing for a budding friendship. Head out to your local art, history or science museum for an afternoon of educational and inspiring fun.

- **Go hear a speaker.** Invite a new friend to attend a talk about a topic that interests you both. Attend a local TED Talk, check out a speaker on campus or head to the library for a lecture or reading.
Eat. We humans bond best over food, and getting together for a bite to eat is a great way to have some fun and spend quality time with a new friend. Try a new restaurant together, or host a dinner party for a few friends. Take a walk to get some ice cream, or order up some takeout and head to the park.

Host a game night. Pick a couple of your favorite games, and host a game night. Invite a few people you know, and welcome each person to bring a guest. Playing games is a great way to get to know new people, and everyone in attendance will have the opportunity to expand their social circle.
Go bike riding. A leisurely bike ride is good exercise, and heading out with a friend makes for a great afternoon of camaraderie. Find a map of your local bike trails online, and pick a destination, or just ride for the pleasure of it.

Head for the hills. Head out of town for an exciting adventure exploring nearby towns or your favorite recreational area. Getting out of town can renew and rejuvenate body, mind and spirit. Make it a day trip, or plan an overnight group campout.

Stroll the farmer's market. The local farmer's market is a great hangout for a social Saturday morning. Enjoy some coffee, take in the sights while you peruse delicious things, then head home and have some brunch.

Join a league. Ask your new pals if they'd be interested in joining a league or team with you. It'll help you solidify a new friendship and provide plenty of opportunities for socializing.

Attend a performance. Your town probably has its fair share of performances each month. From concerts at the local stadium to events at the performing arts center, church or high school auditorium, you can enjoy high quality entertainment year round.

Go treasure hunting. Check out garage sales in your area, or visit antique and vintage shops to find plenty of fodder for conversation and lots of treasures along the way.
FRIENDSHIP PROMOTES SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY
The support of peers, friends and family is a crucial factor in recovering from an addiction. A study published in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* reports that social support buffers stress, provides hope and gives strength in trying times. Friends are essential in recovery, and meeting new friends will improve your sense of belonging and wellbeing and increase your happiness and quality of life for the long-term.

2 John Hopkins Medicine. Do You have a Healthy Number of Friends? Retrieved From https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_connections/do-you-have-a-healthy-number-of-friends


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