How to Make Friends

I’m writing this guide for my kids as they grow up and go out into the world — but it’s for anyone who wants to connect with others.

I’m writing it for my teenage self, who was shy and awkward and self-conscious. I’m writing it as a reminder to my current self, who is still those things.

But I’ve been lucky enough to make a handful of good friends, awesome people who are sucking the juice out of life, who wake up every day with gratitude and energy. I’m lucky to have them, and it makes me reflect on what I’ve done right, and what they do all the time when making connections with people.

Here’s what I’ve learned. It’s not a comprehensive guide, nor will it work for everyone. I still hope it’s useful.

Guidelines for Making Friends

In my experience, people (generally) want to be friends with other people who follow these general guidelines:

- **Be positive, not negative**. While it’s OK to share your struggles with people (I recommend it), if you’re complaining all the time, and are generally negative about other people and life in general, then people get tired of the complaining and negativity. We have enough trouble in life without having friends who are negative all the time. That said, a good friend will always listen when you’re in need, so don’t take this as “never complain.” Instead, just generally try to be a positive person, and if you have struggles, also try to show how you’re tackling those struggles with a positive outlook.
- **Be interested & a good listener**. Be interested in other people! Don’t make the mistake of only wanting to talk about your stuff, and being bored and unimpressed with what other people are doing. I try to find the interesting in everyone, even if they lead a relatively uneventful life, there’s something fascinating about them. When someone wants to talk, listen. If they only talk about themselves all day and don’t want to hear your stuff, then they probably aren’t going to be a great friend, but still give them a chance and be interested for as long as you can.
- **Be excited about life, have energy**. We generally don’t want a friend who is bored all the time. Someone who is excited about life, interested in things, has good energy … that’s someone you’d by hyped to be around. Not super hyper, necessarily, but just containing a positive energy.
- **Do interesting things**. If you’re excited about life, you manifest that by doing new

things, learning, creating, exploring, trying out new experiences, meeting new people. If you are this kind of person, you'll be interesting. If you shut out life, people might not be as interested.

- **Tell good stories**. No one wants to listen to someone who tells long boring stories. After the first two such stories, people generally start tuning you out. So try to keep your stories shorter, unless you can tell people are interested. Find something interesting to hook their curiosity, and then draw them in with that curiosity until you satisfy it with a good ending. Practice your storytelling when you meet people, and try to get better at it. It's not one of my strong points, to be honest, but I recognize that and am trying to be better.
- **Smile**. I'm not saying you should have a fake smile, but a smile puts you in a friendly mood, versus frowning at someone. Don't smile all the time, or at inappropriate times. Just generally have a smiling disposition, as it signals that you like the person (also try to genuinely like the person, moving away from tendencies to judge them or complain about them).
- **Put yourself out there, be willing to try things**. Sing in public even if that scares you. Try new food, new experiences, new ideas. This open-mindedness attracts others who are looking to get the most out of life.
- **Be calm, not overly dramatic**. While it's great to have a lot of energy, people who are overly dramatic about little things can be a turn-off. So learn to react to most problems as if they're not a big deal (because they usually aren't), and handle them with calmness instead of overreacting.
- **Be authentic, don't try to show off**. All of the above recommendations might seem like I'm recommending that you be someone you're not. I'm not recommending that at all. Instead, I want you to be an authentic version of yourself (there are lots of versions of ourselves) — but choose the version that is more in the directions recommended above, in general. If there is a positive and negative version of you, generally choose the positive version. But most importantly, don't try to impress people all the time — if you're confident in yourself, you don't need to impress. Instead, be a genuine person, not just the "best you." When this recommendation is in conflict with any of the above recommendations, choose this one.
- **Be happy with yourself & confident**. This is just something that's good to do for yourself. Be happy with who you are, even the flaws. If you are, you can be confident that you're good enough when you meet someone else. People generally don't respect someone who is constantly harsh on themselves. How can you learn to be happy with yourself? That's a whole other post, but in general, become aware of any tendency to be harsh and critical of yourself, and don't let yourself stew in those kinds of thoughts. Start to see the good in yourself, the genuine heart and caring nature, and let that be the story you tell yourself about yourself.

I don’t claim to be an expert at any of this (my friend Tynan is a much better expert, and wrote an excellent book you should check out), but this is what I believe to be true right now.

I hope this helps, and if you find yourself lacking in any of these areas, see it not as confirmation that you suck, but as an exciting new area for you to explore.