Know When to Close the Conversation: Be attentive to possible cues of disinterest (person avoids eye contact, person consistently provides short answers, person has tense tone of voice, person does not ask you questions in return, person looks at watch/makes movement towards door/starts packing up their things). Don’t try to rush a relationship. Allow the person to gracefully exit and perhaps return to connecting at another time (you never know, the other person may have been shy or had another obligation which made them rush the first time).

Close the Conversation with Something Positive (if applicable): Express your feelings about meeting (“I’m glad I got to meet you”), appreciate something you learned from the person (“I found our conversation about X really interesting”), wish the person well on whatever they revealed they are doing/thinking about (“Good luck with X”), express interest in connecting with the person in the future (at minimum, “I hope to see you around again”).

Practice: Some people find it helpful to practice their speaking skills out loud and in front of the mirror. Others like to review themselves on video or audiotape. You may benefit from practicing with friends or family. As you practice, imagine you’re interacting exactly as you want. Research shows positive imagery can result in actual success. You can also imagine yourself handling an obstacle superbly. Consider joining one of the many groups at the GT Counseling Center to practice being social in a safe atmosphere or attend one of the center’s social skills workshops to learn more conversation techniques and tips. Allow yourself to go out and practice in the real world. Embrace any “mistakes” as great learning lessons and wonderful funny stories to tell future people in your life.

Reference: The Counseling Center Village (Univ of Texas at Dallas, Univ of Mary Washington, Univ of Tennessee at Martin, Univ of Florida, California State Univ at Long Beach, State Univ of New York at Buffalo, Univ of Wisconsin-Eau Claire)
Building relationships is scary for many people. But, the only way to develop social skills is to take risks interacting and then learn from each experience. While not an easy process for many, the alternative of not taking these social risks almost guarantees a lonely outcome.

Loneliness is a very painful experience. One can feel social loneliness when one is literally isolated from other people or emotional loneliness when one does not have meaningful connections despite exposure to social environments. Humans likely require social connection as we are probably “wired” to interaction. For example, researchers have found infants do not properly develop even if all of their basic needs are met but they lack human contact. While it’s perfectly okay to not be looking for an intimate relationship, striving for some friendships is probably still important for your own sense of fulfillment and personal development. If you need help with managing the anxiety this might entail, check out our stress management workshop as well.

Many people fear taking the initiative in being social due to worries about potential embarrassment, rejection, or remembering past painful experiences. If your history is holding you back from new efforts try examining your memories from an adult point of view or seek objective feedback from someone else such as a supportive family member, mentor, clergy, or counselor. To deal with future fears, try developing alternative thoughts such as:

- Focus on your choosing how to define yourself. Your self-definition does not have to depend on other people’s reactions. For instance, you can think, “I’m proud of myself being brave and nice enough to give that person a compliment.” If you focus on how your feel about your behavior, whether or not that person chooses to respond favorably to your compliment does not matter.
- Seek to take care of your own needs and self-development. This will allow you to be less fearful of other people leaving you. Develop a well-rounded you, complete with interest, hobbies and other pursuits that bring you energy. Focus on building your confidence and conformity with yourself and you will naturally attract others with your positive energy.
- Remember, there is not just one person that is “right” for you. Many people who thought their life was ruined because of a particular person’s rejection later found someone else with whom they were much happier.
- It’s actually better to find out there is a relationship mismatch earlier in the meeting process. You want to find people who like you for who you inherently are.
- We all have flaws. There are probably many happily attached people who have the same flaws you do. You are looking for someone who will be happy with you as you are right now. Any one else is not a good fit.
- It’s better to overestimate how well you are liked than to be pessimistic. Research show an overestimation leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of positive relationship outcomes in your favor!
- Remember, all relationships start out feeling awkward and will eventually feel more comfortable as people get to know one another. Ride out this initial stage—it will pass.

Tips on How To Meet New People:

- Pay Attention to Your Non-Verbal: try to appear friendly to others by smiling, keeping obstacles away (e.g. don’t cross your arms), say “hello”, nodding your head, leaning forward toward the person, providing eye contact. Also, people who keep up their hygiene seem more approachable to others. Regular exercise often makes people seem more radiant (perhaps due to the extra blood flow) which can be appealing too.
- Find your niche: consider participating in a special interest group, intramural league or volunteer organization to increase the likelihood you’ll encounter people with similarities. A great way to meet people is to get involved in a common project together.
- Have something to say: cultivate your knowledge on topics that interest you (world events, campus news, pop culture, literature/movies, or other specialized interests) so you can carry on a conversation. And remember, we are all experts about something. Give yourself credit for what you know.
- Be A Curious Listener: Be careful not to be so concerned about what you have or will say that you can’t really listen to the other person. Try to show you are paying attention by summarizing what you hear the other person is saying and then asking open-ended question to prompt the person to keep talking. (open-ended questions avoid the answer of just “yes” or “no”).
- Use “Free Information”: You can figure out conversation starters from clues about the person—maybe an insignia on their clothes, the location where you are meeting, observing what is catching their interest.
- Talk in the First Person and Volunteer Information about Yourself: Use “I language” to make your conversation feel more personalable. For example, instead of saying “people seem to like this place” you could say “I like the music and the atmosphere here”. If you are asked a closed-ended question (where the typical answer would be “yes” or “no”) volunteer additional information that may trigger a conversation. Try to talk about in-the-moment shared experiences. For example, you could say to someone who seems shy and alone at a gathering, “is the temperature hot in here or am I just feeling anxious about not knowing anyone at this party?”