Dear Alice,

I am a freshman who has just moved into the "social dorm." It's only been a few days, but I already feel like my place in the social strata is being cemented? I'm somewhat overweight, and although I can be very talkative and can force myself to make the effort to meet people despite being nervous, I feel like I'm already being classed as one of the straight-edge less popular types. I don't mind that I'm not the type who makes 500 friends instantly; I'm still managing to make a few good acquaintances/potential friends.

The problem is that the people I make friends with aren't really the party types, and while I'm not a huge party person either, I still want to get to go to some and have the whole "college experience." How is it that other people are "in the know" about parties and stuff like, as soon as they get here? What are the qualities that make them seem to bond so instantly? How do I get myself invited to at least some of these events?? I don't want to crash the parties and show up alone...

Answer

Dear Reader,

Being in a new environment requires adjustment for many people, and feelings of sadness, uncertainty, fear and/or disappointment are normal, if not widespread, during this transition. Even those "party people" are probably grappling with some uncertainties of their own. With so much newness around you compounded by demands from school, meeting new people and getting involved in social activities are great ways to help make the transition easier and more enjoyable. Although there's no surefire way to get "in the know," your conscious effort of going out and meeting new people are great first steps in finding your niche. However, fully settling in (both inside and outside the classroom) may take more than just a few weeks. During this transition, two core ideas to keep in mind are:

1. Have patience ? making new friends takes time.
2. The more people you meet, the more likely you are to find others who share your interests, regardless of what they may be.

First of all, ask yourself: What kind of friends are you looking to make? If you're looking for activity partners, exploring student groups or intramural sports on campus may be a great place to start. Since these groups revolve around common interests, this could be a prime place to meet people who you relate to and who may open you up to other social spheres.
Additional resources you may consider tapping are your Resident Advisor (RA) if you live in university housing or your school's student affairs office (or an equivalent office that runs student groups at your school). These resources might also be listed on your college's website if you're not sure where to find them on campus. The more people you meet, the more likely you are to receive invitations for various activities you enjoy, including the occasional party.

Another question: What does this "college experience" mean to you? Sometimes college first years who are away from home for the first time may feel the need to "reinvent" themselves and/or leave behind their high school identity. While this is a great time in life to explore, the strongest friendships are those based on common bonds, so don't lose sight of the great qualities you already have. You may not like spending every weekend partying like your neighbors, but it doesn't mean that you don't enjoy your time spent elsewhere with others or alone.

College may also offer a great opportunity to learn skills such as time management. A healthy extracurricular life may help balance the stresses of school, but for some people, learning to keep that balance is difficult. Maintaining a schedule for school, work, and play may help ensure that you make time for all of these activities. Try exploring a variety of different social activities and you may find that the party scene is just one of many ways to stay entertained. See the related Q&As for additional ideas.

Hopefully using some of these tips will help you make new connections, but if you continue to feel unsatisfied or out of the social loop, consider talking to a mental health professional who may be able to help you sort through your feelings. Other resources may include a campus ministry, career centers, and even your professors or peers who may have personal experiences similar to yours.

The bottom line is that meaningful friendships don't materialize overnight. Your friendships at home took time to develop as will the new ones you make at college. Sticking your neck out, as scary as it may seem, may be the best way to get the ball rolling. Your enthusiasm and openness to meeting new people is a great characteristic, so remain confident and you might be surprised how things fall into place.

Alice!
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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [8]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [9]
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