Dear Alice,

I'm having a tough time as a first year student. My classes aren't too difficult, I'm not very homesick, I don't miss my parents too much. That's all OK. The problem is that I'm lonely. I have reached out to people in classes, in dining halls, everywhere! All I get in return is a brush-off. I give my phone number to people and they don't care enough to reciprocate. I sit with people during meals and never see them again. It's three weeks into the semester? have people made their friends already? I know there are people out there who are potential friends, but where are they? Are they also locking themselves up in their rooms and hiding in the library between classes and at night? I'm a nice, honest, and sincere person. I had a few very close friendships in high school and I'm not the outgoing party animal who needs a wide circle of friends to feel secure. I just need one or two close friends. People who are loyal and who need a friend as much as I need one. I just can't seem to find anyone who is as interested in me as I am in them. I'm a naturally shy and quiet person but my old friends tell me that once people get to know me, they'll really like me. I don't like parties, and I'd rather have one or two close friends than 15 acquaintances. What can I do?

Signed,

A Loner

Answer

Dear A Loner,

Don't worry? this early in the game, it's completely normal to wonder where your future friends are. Just remember that you are only three weeks into the semester. Perhaps your high school friendships developed over a much longer period of time. During the beginning of your first year, you may find that your social anxiety reaches its peak. It may take a while for you to find your crowd and warm up to the people around you. Remember, even very sociable people share your same concerns (they may simply be expert at hiding it).

Having to introduce yourself to many people may be difficult after having only a few close friendships. To maximize your friendship quest, try to steer clear of the mindset that the only friend worth making is one that will grow to be a best friend. After all, most friendships start out as acquaintances; a few of those may develop into close friends-for-life.

In the coming weeks, you'll have plenty of opportunities to meet and interact with new people. You mentioned that you've already tried to connect with a few people. Perhaps you can step
up your initiative by making specific plans while you are face-to-face with someone. For instance, you can ask a classmate to be a study partner; ask a roommate if s/he wants to hit the gym, library, dinner, a movie, etc. Your Resident Advisor (RA) might also have some good ideas for meeting people who you might get along with. Lastly, social networking sites make it especially easy to connect with people if you ever feel flustered while chatting in person.

What are your interests? Joining a club or interest group can provide just enough structure to meet people easily without feeling awkward. There are tons of student groups on campus, and new members are always welcome. You can even go to a few different meetings (check bulletin boards, activity fairs, etc.) to try some groups on for size. Continue going to the ones where you feel comfortable and engaged? where you sense a common interest with the other members.

If you’re feeling frustrated by your large number of acquaintances and lack of life-long pals, just remember that patience is key. True friendships take time to develop. You never know? that acquaintance from down the hall might turn out to be a valuable friend in the future. If you’re feeling down or lonely, you can always seek support from your high school friends and family. Or you could mention your frustration to another first year? who knows, maybe s/he is feeling the same way! Be persistent, have patience, and true friendships will come your way.

Alice!
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Published date:
Oct 01, 1993
Last reviewed on:
Aug 30, 2013
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