Dear Alice,

I have ADHD, managed for a year now with medication. My social skills are very poor, and this is not bad self-esteem talking (I have no friends at all). Programs to learn social skills all seem to be for children, where can a student go to improve on this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It can be difficult to make friends when you feel like you haven’t fine-tuned your social skills. That being said, you’re not alone in struggling to build and maintain relationships — many people experience a level of anxiety in social situations. For people living with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), symptoms such as trouble paying attention and completing tasks, can make social interactions even more challenging and interfere with relationships. For example, many adults with ADHD report forgetting to return phone calls and missing appointments. The good news is that there are treatment options out there — geared towards adults with ADHD — that help to improve communication skills and identify strategies for developing relationships. While medication treats some aspects of ADHD, adding other types of treatment, such as behavior therapy and small lifestyle changes, may help you to pinpoint why you’re having trouble forming relationships and adopt strategies for living with ADHD.

Adult ADHD tends to have different symptoms and the impacts present differently than in children. You mentioned you’ve been managing your ADHD with medication for a bit now; if you aren’t already, working with a mental health professional could be helpful in discussing your desire for greater social connection. If you’re a student, you may find speaking with someone at your campus counseling center to be useful. The Go Ask Alice! Q&A How to find a therapist may also be a helpful tool. Fortunately, there are several types of therapy recommended for adults with ADHD that focus on teaching new skills:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** supports recognizing problematic behaviors and adopting behavior changes to achieve goals.
- **Acceptance commitment therapy** aims to empower individuals to engage in behaviors that are aligned with their values.
- **Group therapy** involves participating in a form of therapy within a group dynamic.
- **Coaching** pairs individuals with a coach that provides advice, guidance, and support for the difficulties of living with ADHD.

*Adapted from Cleveland Clinic* [3].

In addition to behavioral therapy, there are some strategies you might try on your own to help you navigate some of the day-to-day challenges of living with ADHD, hopefully setting the stage for growth in your social circle:

- **Create a to-do list.** Writing down what you want to accomplish each day may help you to keep track of your goals. You may find it useful to think about what’s essential and try not to take on too much. Perhaps you can add items such as “reach out to a group you’re interested in joining” or “email a person you recently met” to build some social connections.
- **Break down tasks.** Dividing up tasks into smaller steps can make them feel less overwhelming. For instance, you might first determine what personal interests you’d like to explore, then you can find a group that’s focused on that interest, and finally you can reach out to them to express your interest in joining.
- **Keep track of appointments.** Using an electronic calendar or appointment book may help you to remember appointments and deadlines. If a particular group has a standing meeting maybe you can add a reminder to attend.
- **Download a phone app.** Trying one of the many apps out there can encourage daily activities such as setting reminders and task management. You could check out this list of helpful apps for people living with ADHD [4].

*Adapted from Mayo Clinic* [5].

It takes a lot of courage and self-acceptance to reach out and ask for help. ADHD affects every person differently. Exploring options such as behavioral therapy and lifestyle tips may help you to figure out why you’re struggling in your relationships and to learn new skills. While it can be intimidating to put yourself out there, being open (as you’ve done here) is a great first step. You may also find that by educating your peers about your experience with ADHD, you may help them understand you better and work towards creating a support system. Best of luck!

Alice!

Category:
- Emotional Health [6]
- Communication Concerns [7]
- Relationships [8]
- Friendship [9]

**Related questions**

- What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? Does Ritalin help? [10]
- Types of therapists [11]
- How do you know if therapy is working? [12]