

## Making friends when I have low self-esteem <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

Your advice to "Surround yourself with positive, healthy people" is good. But this is part of my insecurities. It seems that everyone will want to surround themselves with positive, healthy people; but if I'm not healthy mentally, why should people want to be around me? I fear I'm excluded because, even when I try to hide my insecurities, they still show and people don't want to be around a "downer." Any advice on this aspect?

### Answer

Dear Reader,

Sounds like a tricky position: building self-esteem through social support may feel challenging if you're concerned that people won't want to befriend someone with low self-esteem. Many people face this dilemma, and some experience more difficulty in the realm of building social support than others. However, just because you may be struggling with mental health issues doesn't mean that others won't want to be your friend. Additionally, friendships are reciprocal; they're dependent on both parties giving and receiving in the relationship. Developing relationships with others and with yourself take effort — in other words, to have a good friend, it helps to be a good friend. In addition to getting to know others better, taking some time for yourself to work on your self-esteem and self-acceptance <sup>[2]</sup> may be helpful. You say you fear people won't want to be around a downer. Do you see yourself that way? If so, it may be worth exploring what's behind your feelings of being a downer (more on that in a bit). Keep reading for more on how to develop closer friendships and how to improve your self-esteem.

Focusing on being a good friend can help you develop strong relationships with others around you. Adopting a few key strategies and characteristics can help you in this direction, which include:

- **Listening.** Use active listening skills to indicate that you're engaged in the conversation with them. Some of these skills include making appropriate eye contact, having open body language, and responding appropriately to their comments.
- **Sharing.** Open yourself up to others and be willing to share your personal experiences with others. This will help deepen your connection with others.

- **Being available.** Be sure to make time to see your friends and speak with them between the times that you see each other in person.
- **Showing kindness.** This is a simple idea and is one of the backbones to any friendship.
- **Being trustworthy.** Follow through with commitments, show up on time, and keep your word.
- **Calming your nerves.** Use mindfulness techniques to help settle any nerves you're experiencing to help reduce any anxiety you may experience about going to spend time with friends.

*Adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#) [3].*

If you're struggling with places or ways to meet people, consider what it is you care about or like to do and then find places or groups who are involved in these activities. For example, you could try volunteering. How about joining a cause or an organization that matters to you? Perhaps initiating hang out time with co-workers or fellow students whose company you enjoy, or spending time in public reading or studying (porch, coffee shop, parks)? You could also connect with others over hobbies you enjoy. What about a painting, dancing, pottery, or cooking class? If you're looking for other ideas on where to meet people, you could read [Where to meet people over the summer](#) [4] in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

You mentioned trying to hide insecurities, but they show anyway. Is it possible that your focus on hiding may be interfering with your ability to connect with others? Many people who form authentic and meaningful connections with others possess a quality of curiosity and appreciation for other people's gifts and for their "quirks." Few people are entirely free of insecurities, but when a person has awareness of their own insecurities (what they are, where they come from, how they feel), they may actually become a means of connection. Your feelings of insecurity, for example, may allow you to empathize with others who share an experience of struggling with self-esteem, as many people do.

Insecurities may have roots in past experiences of rejection, for example, or experiences of stereotyping, discrimination, or bullying. Messages received by loved ones about personal deficiencies may also reinforce insecurities. They may not be easy to overcome, but consciously working on it while leaving room to be present for another will go a long way to improving the quantity and quality of your relationships.

To further explore concerns around insecurities or self-esteem in general, you may want to consider talking with a mental health professional. Therapy may serve as space to process feelings and thoughts and also a place to "rehearse" for life. While this relationship is not a friendship, it's a form of intimate human relationship that may help you learn to build other close relationships. It may only take one or two conversations with a mental health professional to help you find a comfortable plan of action, or a longer term relationship with a professional may help address your self-esteem concerns beyond relationship-building strategies.

The situation at hand may seem like a feedback loop, but ongoing efforts spent investing in your social relationships and yourself may let your real self truly shine!

Alice!

Category:

[Emotional Health](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[Relationships](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

[Friendship](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

[Relationship Boosters](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

## Related questions

[Building self-confidence](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[Good stress?](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[Can loneliness kill?](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

## Resources

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\) \(Morningside\)](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

[Mental Health Services \(CUIMC\)](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

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