

Loneliness isn't inevitable – a guide to making new friends as an adult

Striking up friendships can be tricky – and studies show millions of us are lonely.

Amy Sedghi – Mon 30 Apr 2018

When you are a child in the playground it is pretty simple, but “Do you want to be my friend?” isn’t a line you hear from adults. Teenage years are filled with friendships easily made (and some easily forgotten), when you are feeling **keen**, sociable and energetic. Then there are engagements, marriage, relocation, career changes, families: life comes calling with its multiple demands, and friendships evolve as a result. I have been happy to see my friends move through these huge life moments, but as much as I value my friendships, I have found myself lonely at times. Some friends are physically far away, while others are time-poor and, with the best will in the world, it isn’t simple to see each other as often as we would like.

According to a recent study by the Red Cross in partnership with Co-op, more than nine million adults in the UK are often or always lonely. Loneliness is something we all feel at times and to varying degrees, but it can also be something that we feel uneasy about admitting to.

A study, published in the journal *Personal Relationships*, found that investing in close relationships was associated with better health, happiness and wellbeing in adulthood.

Still, making friends as an adult can be hard, and takes time – last week a study from the University of Kansas found that two people need to spend 90 hours together to become friends, or 200 hours to qualify as close friends.

Clinical psychologist Linda Blair agrees that this can be difficult to achieve: “Usually the basis of making a friend is a shared experience.” These are often in abundance in our earlier years, but once those easy opportunities are gone, you can forget that the initial basis for a friendship is to have a similar passion or interest. Joining a group or class based on something you really love, or volunteering for something you care about, can be a great first step for finding friendships, she advises.

Although it can be tricky and nerve-racking, making new friends as an adult can also be rewarding: a message Jacqueline Thomas, 52, is keen to share. Moving to the Warwickshire village of Bulkington in 2015 with her partner David, who is soon to retire, she **relished** the opportunity to start anew.

“We’ve had to **start from scratch** because we didn’t know anybody here. Our kids have grown up, so we were looking at a slightly quieter life, but it’s actually turned out to be busier than before,” she says. She credits signing up to a variety of classes and groups at the village hall as the catalyst for her new friendships. Don’t be afraid to try something new, she stresses.

A lifelong wheelchair user, Jacqueline was intrigued by a poster in the village hall advertising an adapted martial arts class. Having gone along with some doubts, she was surprised to find how much she enjoyed it. Encouraged by her teacher, Carl Hodgetts, who in 2006 became the first wheelchair-using kickboxing instructor in the UK, she now proudly holds a white belt in Shiyong Do adapted martial art. “It just takes one **leap of faith**. Even if you’re absolutely terrified, do it,” she says. - 203