

Making Friends is Hard

Making friends is hard. I made my first Western friend as I moved into residence and eventually made my second friend in 4th year. Despite what social media or your favourite movie may tell you, not everyone makes friends easily while on campus, and this can really affect you having the best student experience. If you are struggling to make friends, you know first-hand the impacts it can have on you, and the research supports that.

- Peers serve as a crucial support system due to shared trust, their ability to recognize early signs of distress, and their close presence, which foster a sense of acceptance and belonging (Parmar, J.S., et al, 2025).
- Loneliness is associated with sleep problems, lower life satisfaction, and experiences of depression (Ellard, O.B., et al, 2023).
- Cutting off a victim from their support system and social connections is a common tactic within abusive relationships. This isolation can make it harder to leave abusive situations.

Here are some strategies you can try to have more social connections on campus and hopefully make some new friends.

Reminder, you can't force someone to be friends with you, to like you, or to have a conversation with you. When trying to make friends, pay attention to people's words and body language, and if they seem uninterested or uncomfortable, it's okay to move on.

Set a SMART goal: It's a high bar to set for yourself to make a best friend. Instead create a SMART goal for yourself that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. Try replacing 'make a best friend' with a goal that is easier to attain such as 'this week, ask 3 people about the reading before class'. The only way to start building deeper and more meaningful friendships is to practice talking to other people and putting yourself out there.

Build up your healthy communication skills: Knowing how to introduce yourself or talk to people in healthy ways is a skill that needs to be practiced just like anything else. Can you attend any campus trainings on building up your interpersonal communication skills? There are lots of interesting workshops offered through the Learn to Lead program (LINK) or mental health groups dedicated to challenging anxiety or building up healthy relationship skills (LINK). Bonus if you can make a new social connection at one of these workshops!

Using friends to make friends: A friendship strategy that has been very successful for me is to befriend the friends of my friends. You probably share similar values or interests with your friend, so it makes sense that some of their friends would have some overlap with you too. These people in your extended circle may not turn into close friendships right away, but they could become acquaintances or more opportunities for social connection. It's a bonus if your friend is extroverted and can help make some of those connections for you.

Know what you want: Sometimes you may feel like being in an unhealthy friendship or a relationship that makes you feel bad is worth it to not lose out on a friend/ social connection. You deserve to have friends, partners, and peers that like you, respect you, listen to your needs, and make you feel good about yourself. If a friend or partner makes you feel bad about yourself or hurts you, you do not have to stay in that relationship. You can reach out to the Gender-based Violence & Survivor Support Case Managers on strategies for navigating toxic friendships or safety planning for leaving unhealthy relationships.

Reach out for support: It's hard to be in class of hundreds of people or in line at the Spoke surrounded by people and still feel lonely and isolated. If you are feeling this way, remember there are supports available on campus for you talk about what you're feeling. You are not alone. (GBSV Support link)

While it can be challenging to making friends or get to know new people, there are lots of benefits for outing yourself out there and trying to have more social connections. By taking small, intentional steps and allowing yourself time, you can find your people at Western.