

Interacting with Students: Making Friends and Staying Safe

Whether you're in a classroom, in a dormitory, or out and about, you'll encounter other people at college. Meeting so many new people at a new place can be stressful, but don't worry. Here are some tips on how to make friends, keep your old ones, and stay safe at parties.

1.) To make new friends at college, it's up to you to meet new people and arrange times to hang out with them.

* Back in high school, you were cramped in one building with different people, many of whom shared classes or lunchtimes with you. But in college, everyone's more spread out on the space-time continuum. Not even lunch schedules coincide anymore. From here on out, if you want to make friends *and maintain your friendships*, you have to put effort into seeing each other. That will be true for the rest of your life.

* For better or for worse, almost nobody will know you from high school.

- If you gained a bad reputation back then, the slate is wiped clean. This is your chance to start out fresh!

- On the flip side of things, if you were known for being friendly or intelligent, then don't expect any special treatment at college from other students or your professors. You have to prove yourself through your actions.

* Be honest about who you are. You don't want to be a fake person for four years, do you?

- If you acted fake at high school just to gain acceptance, this is a great time to let the real you shine through.

* All incoming students are nervous about making friends, so remember you're not the only one feeling anxious! Don't be surprised if a few conversations turn out awkward: the other person probably isn't used to meeting lots of brand new people either.

- It's not the end of the world if some of your conversations fall flat—some will, in fact. Remember, it takes two people to have a conversation, so if one talk comes out awkward, it's not necessarily your fault.

- Just keep trying. You'll find someone you can relate to eventually, but not if you give up on talking to people. Like they say, you only fail when you quit trying.

- If you want something to happen, then you have to try to make it happen. That's obvious, but it's a lesson we often forget.

* Dale Carnegie, self-help writer and lecturer, has given some insightful advice on making friends. I want to put lots of emphasis on this point of his: "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

- Yes, rather than just "put yourself out there" to make friends, view it another way. Your goal is to learn about other people, who in turn will want to learn about you.

- Asking other people what their major is, where they're from, if they participate in any clubs on campus, what their high school was like, or just how college is treating them can be good conversation starters. If they're in the same class as you, try striking up a conversation about that.

* Try joining a club that lines up with your interests.

- At a club, you have to take the initiative to talk with others and introduce yourself since many members might know each other already.

- TALK. Don't just sit there on your phone: nobody will approach you while you're busy poking your rectangle.

- If you find yourself surrounded by zombies addicted to their smartphones, you might want to be bold and just interrupt their texting to introduce yourself or ask about the club.

- If there isn't a club that matches your interests, then ask your school how to go about making one! Yes, you may have to step out of your comfort zone, and your club might not succeed. But maybe it will succeed—and people will be grateful you took that initiative.

- If you want something to happen, you actually have to do something. Again, that's a good motto for life.

- Anyway, have a clear purpose for the club in mind. Some colleges will want more than “fun” or “to unite people with similar interests” to be the reason. Also have a few activities in mind, ones for insiders and others to entertain and draw in outsiders too, such as movie viewings.

* In college, people tend to be more accepting of diversity.

- We usually think of diversity in terms of race, orientation, religion, and so on, but many college students are also more open to accepting people with unique interests.

- So if you're into My Little Pony, stamp collecting, or Mongolian artwork, then don't be afraid to tell other people. Heck, you could show it through a t-shirt or other means. You walk by many people every day, so maybe someone will be super excited to find another fan. At the very least, people will know more about you and appreciate your boldness. Maybe they'll want to learn more about your interests, and that will strike up a conversation.

* While you're walking around campus, make it clear that you're open to conversation.

- Walking around campus with your head down doesn't exactly make people want to speak with you.

- Walking around campus with headphones doesn't exactly help either. It's also dangerous because you can't hear incoming vehicles, people calling “Watch out!” or “Help!”, and other wonderful noises.

- Texting and walking usually gives off a “I don't wanna talk” vibe too.

- Rather than isolate yourself like that, try soaking in the ambience around you as you look around and hear other people's voices. That's more satisfying and peaceful anyway. College life can be hectic, so why make yourself even more busy? Enjoy the quiet moments.

- And if you pass by someone with their head up too, smile, nod, and give them a little greeting. The worst that could happen is that they ignore you. No biggie. Alternatively, perhaps that little greeting could be the beginning of a friendly chat.

* You will walk into some classes, even up to your last semester, and know nobody in there. In cases like these, I'd strongly recommend making at least one acquaintance in case you need help from a fellow student later on.

* You may know some fellow students from high school, especially if you go somewhere near your old stomping grounds. If you enjoy hanging out with them, great! But resist the temptation to hang out with them only because you happen to know them already and you're too nervous to meet new people on your own. No matter what, you should meet new people at college.

- * If you want to maintain your old friendships, it's up to you to find time to hang out with each other. You no longer have school gluing you together.
- Take the initiative to set up hang out times with your old friends during some weekends or other breaks.
- Also, doing more than clicking "Like" on their Facebook statuses throughout the year can help too. Ask how they're doing, comment on their posts, etc.
- You must be willing to accept that some friendships will become less deep or fade away. That's the inevitable effect of miles and years separating people.
- Plus, you changed at least some during your four years of high school, right? Well, you and your friends will keep changing during your four years of college. Again, you just have to accept that.
- Some of your deeper friendships can truly last, though, if you take the initiative to foster them. Like a plant, they'll grow with consistent attention and care.
- In my novel *Friends to the End, and Here's the End*, the protagonist's mom has a similar message about maintaining friendships for the long term, but that's a whole other story... literally.

2.) Treat your roommate with respect and be ready to adapt to your new dorm life.

Disclaimer: I was a commuter, so this section is based largely on stuff I overheard throughout the years. But people always had a whole lot to say about their roommates, so I think I've gathered some good tips.

- * Incoming college students are often nervous about living in the dorms. So if you're worried, don't worry: almost everyone else is worried too. They haven't gone to college and lived in dorms before either.
- * Go into dorm living with realistic expectations.
 - Your dorm won't feel just like home. Sorry, but only your home will feel like home. Your goal is to just feel comfortable in your dorm.
 - Your roommate doesn't have to be your best friend forever: you just have to live with one another respectfully.
 - If you set your expectations too high, you'll be more likely to get agitated over little things they do.
- * Before going off to college, contact your roommate and divvy up what each of you brings.
 - For example, one person could bring a small TV and another could bring a microwave.
 - Also, make sure they aren't violently allergic to anything you might bring.
- * If your roommate is annoying you—which they will do eventually—then be open about it.
 - Don't discuss it while you're super irritated: wait for a peaceful moment when you both have some time to talk about it thoroughly.
 - Calmly explain *exactly* why you're perturbed; don't dance around the issue.
 - Be specific. Rather than say something like, "I feel like I'm living with a pig," try, "When you leave so many clothes on the floor, I have trouble walking around, and the clutter's making me feel uncomfortable." This will give your roommate clear goals to achieve.
 - Framing your grievances toward other people in statements like, "When you (blank), it makes me feel (blank)," is often an effective way of making your feelings known without attacking someone else.
 - Sometimes, the person will not have even noticed that they were annoying you. Remember, they've never lived with you until now, so why should they know your quirks and pet peeves?
 - Be ready to compromise if necessary.

- Also note that calling your parents and bellyaching about your roommate does not accomplish anything. Whining to your friends about how irritating your roommate is doesn't do much of anything either.

- If your roommate has a grievance toward you, then listen calmly and try not to take it personally. Figure out how you can come to a good solution for everyone.

* If you find that your roommate isn't showing you much respect, ask yourself with complete honesty if you're showing them the utmost respect in every single way possible. Respect is contagious—and so is disrespect. If you treat them more kindly, then maybe they'll treat you more kindly.

* Be open about your own medical needs, even if they're embarrassing.

- For example, if you two share a bathroom and you're prone to getting constipated, they need to know. Otherwise, they might think you're just dilly-dallying in there all the time.

- They also might need to be aware of your allergies. For example, if peanuts are your enemies, then warn your roommate that you'd be more comfortable without jars of peanut butter lining your walls.

* Keep your dorm fairly clean.

- Although you shouldn't force your roommate to make their bed or keep their work desk organized, you have every right to desire a clean shared area. And of course, you should keep your own area clean as well.

- You don't want to lose important material just because you refused to take fifteen minutes to organize things. Cleaning and organizing aren't torture, especially if you listen to some tunes while you tidy up.

* Clearly set up rules with each other on certain subjects if necessary rather than wait for tension to build.

- Verbally agree that you will both knock before entering the dorm. You never want to walk in on your roommate playing the air guitar in their undies. (If you do want to, well, then you need more help than I can offer.)

- How should you handle visitors? How should you time showers? Do certain noises or habits annoy you? Don't assume the answers to any of these.

* Always make sure both you and your roommate keep the dorm locked. Theft in college dorms is rampant. Take valuables home if you head out for a while during a break from school.

* Have a dorm key with you at all times, even if your roommate is there. You never know when they might have to leave suddenly, and you don't want to be locked out of your dorm.

* From the halls and other rooms, there's bound to be some noise. This could affect your studying and your sleeping.

- If you want peace and quiet, consider buying noise-cancelling headphones. They'll make loud dorms more manageable. But remember that silence is only promised in certain parts of the library, not in the dorms.

- There's no way to force everyone into your sleep schedule, so be ready to make some adjustments as you enter college. I'd highly recommend bringing earplugs (foam or custom-made) and eye masks so your roommate doesn't bother you if they have to come back super late, use the bathroom in the middle of the night, or get up early. Remember, their schedule is every bit as important as yours.

- While living in a dorm, it's important to get your sleep and to maintain a regular sleep schedule, even on weekends. That's all simply a part of healthy living. It will help your mood and your thinking skills.
- Irregular sleep schedules are associated with mental disorders such as depression and generalized anxiety, so please take your sleep seriously.
- If you're a very light sleeper or cherish your privacy, consider commuting. The fact of the matter is, if you can't get your sleep in dorms, then you won't do well at school. Being tired all the time will hurt your grades, your happiness, your social life, and more, so take your sleep seriously. I could never operate without lots of sleep, which is part of the reason why I chose to commute.

3.) Be careful about the party scene. You don't need it to make friends.

Disclaimer: I wasn't a party kind of guy, so this section is also based a lot on various things I've heard over the years. But, again, I've heard a whole lot about college parties, so I still think I can offer you some wisdom.

- * Remember that you don't need to be part of the party scene at all.
 - A private online survey found that about 20% of students at my "Catholic" college did not drink alcohol on a regular basis. You can write this off due to the Catholic influence, but I'm sure there's a reasonable percentage of students at secular colleges who don't drink alcohol either.
 - If it seems like everyone drinks, remember that people who don't drink probably won't advertise their status as teetotalers. They don't want to look like snobs.
 - You can make plenty of friends without attending drunken parties. And you'll be sober enough to actually remember what you do together.
- * Some students experiment with alcohol a lot in their early months of college and talk about it all the time. However, it loses that naughty appeal once you get used to your parents not always being around.
 - If you want everyone to know you're a newbie freshman, constantly talk about how cool it feels to drink, what you mix, and so on. Or you could act more like an adult and... not.
- * Just because you drink doesn't mean you have to drink so much that you get hungover or start acting insane. There's nothing like having a night that everyone but you remembers... followed by a miserable day of headaches and puking.
- * If you ever feel uncomfortable at a party for any reason, then leave. There will be other parties.
- * Do not drink in the dorms—yours or anyone else's. From what I've heard, the school will punish you the most brutally if they catch you there. At my small university, most people went off campus to party.
- * If the police become involved in any way, whether they're asking if you've drunk or if someone else has, remember that lying to a police officer is a serious crime—more serious than underage drinking.
- * Of course, the best option is not to go to crazy parties at all.
 - I've heard many stories of people deeply regretting things they've done at parties. However, I haven't heard many stories of people who think their lives would be so much better if they had downed more booze and partied more at college.

- I have met people who wish they'd relaxed a little more during their university years, but you don't need wild parties in order to do that. In fact, the aftermath of that stuff usually makes people even more stressed out.

4.) Be on guard against rape and other forms of sexual assault.

Disclaimer: This is an incredibly serious issue, one I will only scratch the surface of here. I know it will make many people uncomfortable, but I can't ignore sexual violence on this page because it's much more common among young adults in college than those who don't attend a university. For more information and help concerning rape, sexual harassment, and related crimes, please visit the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's website (NSVRC.org).

* Rape is most likely to happen shortly after you begin college.

- Upperclassmen are aware that the freshmen don't know "the ropes" of party scenes. So, the younger ones are most likely to be tricked into getting raped.

- Additionally, according to HelpingSurvivors.org, rape is most common early in the fall semester. Even after your first year, don't let your guard down just because you're excited to see people after the long summer break.

* Know that most rapes occur between people who know each other. So, don't assume you're safe just because you have some sort of relationship with the other person.

* When letting someone visit your dorm, keep the door partway open.

* Be assertive if someone's advancing on you and it's making you uncomfortable.

- Even if they haven't outright asked for sex yet, it's safer to end things sooner rather than later if you want to get rid of them.

- Besides, you went out to enjoy yourself, right? You shouldn't have to put up with anyone irritating you.

* Never accept a drink from someone else: it could be drugged.

- Likewise, keep a close eye on your own drink so nobody can slip something into it.

* There is power in numbers, so make sure you and your friends keep an eye on each other at parties.

* Being drunk puts you at much greater risk for being raped.

* Be aware that, if you're drunk, you can't give consent, so if you wake up from a hangover and vaguely remember having sex, that person raped you. Don't take a shower: call the police right away so that the physical evidence will still be on you and the alcohol or planted drug will be in your blood.

* If you say "stop" while having sex, the other person is legally required to stop right away. If they try coercing you to keep on going, it's rape. Don't let them pressure you into anything you don't want to do.

* If you have to attack or scream for help, then don't hesitate. Don't worry about ruining the rapist's reputation: you're keeping others safe by showing the assailant's true colors.

- * Few men commit rape, but those who do tend to do so multiple times.
 - So, if you get a male rapist arrested for his crime, you're probably saving others from the same fate.
 - It may be embarrassing, but report it for your sake and for the sake of potential future victims.

- * Do not be ashamed if you need psychological help after being raped. It's a traumatic experience, so most people who endure it should get help of some sort.
 - It can also be devastating if you find that some people don't believe you when you say it was rape. This is another reason why you need someone supportive to help you.

- * It is *not* your fault if you are raped.
 - There are some people in this world who blame the victim. And it might be tempting to believe them if you replay the events of the night in your head and think about what you could have done differently. If you did make any decisions you regret, remember that everyone makes mistakes. It's still not your fault.
 - About one in four college women experience rape or attempted rape. Don't assume it only happens to so-called "trashy" or "slutty" women.

- * Men, remember that a woman who's drunk or under the influence of drugs can't give consent, so sex with her is rape.

- * Believe it or not, about 1 out of 10 rape victims in America are men, according to RAINN.org. Perhaps the assailant was another man or a woman using a threat.
 - About 6 to 8% of college men are sexually assaulted, so don't assume it can't happen to you.
 - If you have been raped, don't take a shower after you realize what's happened. Call the police right away so that the physical evidence will still be on you and the alcohol or planted drug will be in your blood.
 - Do not be ashamed to admit what happened just because you think it somehow makes you less "manly." Remember, as I said earlier, many rapists commit their crimes more than once, so the courageous thing to do is stop them by reporting them.

- * Even if you are not explicitly targeted for rape, do not put up with someone who is making you uncomfortable, perhaps through gross insinuations, gestures, or other means. Ditch the creep as soon as you can.

- * If you've been assaulted but you're scared to tell someone about it, then please work up the courage to speak out. No matter how long it's been since the assault, telling someone could be a major step in the healing process.

With all this information, I hope you'll be able to make new friends, keep the old ones, maintain peace with your roommate, and stay safe!

Copyright © 2022 Bobby Miller, All Rights Reserved
BobbyMillerWriter.com

*You may distribute this document for non-commercial use (such as in a classroom)
as long as my website's address remains clearly visible.*