

# Making Friends at 30 in a New Home: Skills I Learned Along the Way

Last Modified on 03/24/2019 3:52 pm EDT



Okay, I'm not actually 30 – but I'm nearly 30!

I want to be really honest about myself in this post. Making new friends as an adult is really hard. It's been a long journey.

Luckily, along the way, I learned more about who I am, and the things I want to keep doing in this new phase of my life.

I also learned a lot about what it means to live somewhere, be part of a community, and do something meaningful. I want to share my insights in this post.

# The university and London bubble

When I went to university (a long time ago now!), the emphasis was on **making friends**. Everyone was in "socialising mode", and it was remarkably easy to make friends. All you had to do was go out to classes, or to one of the many parties on every night, and social circles built up fairly organically.

Also, I think I was more of a stereotypical party-loving person back then. I always had a feeling staying in meant I was missing out – even if going out compromised my wellbeing. As this kind of person, I fit into university culture quite well.

On the other hand, it was one of the worst times of my life mental-health wise. Looking back, there were times when I was pretty unhappy. I had a lot of fun, but I no longer romanticise those times.

Then when I moved to London after uni, I was alone for a while. That was quite a shock, and I had no there friends at all. So I started learning some proper friend-making skills, and eventually I had made a couple of good friends.

But then all my uni and school friends started moving to London too. Naturally, I wanted to hang out with my old friends, and my friend-making skills languished.

For many years, even though I hated London at first, I had a lot of good times with my friends. Apart from some superficial connections and unsuccessful friendships, I never made any new good friends outside my school and university circles.

Then I decided I wanted to become a freelance writer. Due to some madness, I also decided to move away from London to travel. Travelling and freelancing proved incompatible for me, so I eventually settled on Manchester.

So, after five years in London, I eventually moved to THE NORTH.

## Moving to a new city

Moving to a new city means starting all over again. From scratch. And everyone else

has friends, but you don't.

Building a new circle of friends turned out to be very difficult for me.

It caused me a lot of grief to realise I was deficient in this area, since I consider myself quite a sociable person. I had no idea how to go up to someone and just start chatting to them. The difficulty also came from the fact that I felt ashamed that I had no friends to start with. And I'm a freelancer, so I don't have a team at work as a jumping off point.

I'm just not like those people who find it easy to make friends. For me, it was like pulling teeth. I felt like the most unlikeable person in the world, I felt lonely as hell, and I made more mistakes than I want to admit.

After getting over my self-loathing, I realised that I never really learned the **skill of making new friends**. I was good at passively making friends with people if they were already friends of friends, but I wasn't so good at conjuring a social circle out of nothing. So what could I do if I had no social circle?

At first, I did nothing. I grew to enjoy being alone most of the time.

Suddenly I had all this time to just do whatever I wanted! Initially, there wasn't anything I really wanted to do. I just felt lonely.

You have to really value yourself to have fun on your own. Got no one to share your life with? Doesn't matter. Admittedly, I had my boyfriend Simon, but sometimes that felt worse – because he had friends, while I didn't.

**You can be friends with yourself.** I genuinely enjoy spending more of my time alone now, and I look forward to being alone. This also made me more secure when it comes to making friends. I know I can take people or leave them, so I don't feel dependent on anyone to be friends with me.

Here are the techniques I learned for making friends more easily.

## Overcoming Facebook

First, I had to overcome Facebook. Facebook is a barrier, and it is not as helpful for making or keeping friends as you might think.

I have a neutral-hate relationship with Facebook. Sometimes it's okay, and it helps me keep in touch with a few people. Oh, and I like to look back at the photos.

But mostly it's a platform that focuses on the past, and shows you all the events where you weren't invited. This is especially hard when you feel a bit isolated, in a new place where you don't know many people yet. It's also depressing to compare yourself to the best bits of other people's lives, when you don't feel that good about yourself.

In my opinion, Facebook encourages me to have pseudo-relationships with people. Without Facebook, I don't really have a connection to them in real life. It probably works for some people, but I found it to actively be a hindrance when I wanted to build a new social circle in Manchester.

I realised I had to go beyond Facebook if I wanted to find better friends as a nearly-30-year-old.

I didn't delete Facebook altogether, but I did delete all the people I had not talked to on the platform or in real life in over a year. I found that quite a good benchmark for deciding who to stay connected to.

## Find shared activities

Then, I actively had to go out there and meet some people. I learned how to throw myself into my own activities as never before. When you move somewhere new, you have to actively seek out situations where you can meet new people.

I've always had solitary hobbies, but I wanted to now take my interested out into the world. So, I co-founded a [Write the Docs North meetup](#) with my friend Deborah, which is related to my work activities. I'm a co-organiser of the Ethics & Tech reading group, because I love reading and philosophy. I've also recently launched the [Manchester MBTI Enthusiasts meetup](#) too, since personality typology is one of my favourite things to learn about EVER.

I also joined a coworking space, although it took me becoming a member of a few different ones before I found one I really liked. I learned that I can't stand to be isolated all day every day, and I enjoy seeing friendly faces who I can have small talk with.

Making friends through my activities turned out to be a lot better than having drinking or party friends. For a start, we actually had things in common.

I also learned that not all my friends have to be soul mates. We can just connect over a shared activity, and maybe not speak to each other outside of that.

## Learn Game Face

Sometimes when I'm out socialising, I have a tendency to take things very personally. This makes it hard to relax around people I don't know yet.

Then, one of my friends taught me about **Game Face**. You deliberately affect a friendly and relaxed demeanour, that acts as a shield for your vulnerable self.

It sounds a little fake, but it means that not every interaction has to affect me to my very soul. I can still be genuine with people, but I have a concept of "a public face". I choose the people who get to see beyond my Game Face.

When you spend time with real friends and people you love, of course you take off Game Face.

I find it especially helpful for work (I work in a coworking space) where you spend lots of time with people you don't know that well.

Game Face also helps me to relax and have more fun. Whenever I meet anyone socially, I try to make them laugh. I don't take myself as seriously, and I can take some risks – because it will only reflect badly on my Game Face, after all.

As a lifelong perfectionist with social anxiety, it's hard for me to risk social rejection. But the risk is definitely worth it.

## Five minute rule

I literally talk to EVERYONE. But I only talk to them for five minutes. The five minute rule means I don't risk getting stuck into long conversations, when I really need to be getting on with my work for example. But I don't ignore anyone either.

Aiming to talk to everyone makes socialising a lot less stressful. It's better than trying to find the few people you could actually be friends with. If I give everyone five minutes, it makes me a nicer person. I'm not trying to pre-select the people I like. I take things as they come, go with the flow as they say, and don't worry if I make friends with anyone.

I've also learned about my biases, and the type of people who I think I "should" be friends with. I approach everyone with an open mind, and I don't judge what I think they will be like. I also learned how to "disengage" from overly negative people who inadvertently drain my energy. For every, say, 50 people I meet, one might end up being a lasting friend. But those numbers are okay.

## Life is a garden

Like planting seeds in garden, these tips help you plant the seeds to start making some new friends. But those friendships will only grow over time. There will be a long period where you might feel quite alone.

And I'm definitely one of those people who approaches life with a sense of perfectionism. If someone doesn't seem to like me, I can feel like I've failed at something. This used to put me off trying to engage with new people.

Then I realised that social success doesn't hinge on any single moment. It's about putting in the time and effort over a long period of time to build bonds that will last. There is no instant gratification when it comes to making friends.

Happily, I turned round one day and was surprised to find I that had a moderate social circle again. It seemed to take forever to achieve, and yet also felt like it suddenly happened overnight. I guess life is weird like that.

## Final remarks

This website, [succeedsocially.com](https://succeedsocially.com), was amazing for breaking down some of the core concepts of making new friends. It also helps with general anxieties around socialising.

I learned that making friends is different when you're a "proper" adult, because you don't

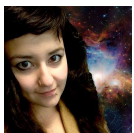
spend as much time with people. I now have quite a few friends dotted all over the place, including some of my freelance clients. I also got to meet so many different types of people, and this has enriched my worldview.

I also like having a relatively free schedule to work on my art and my stories. Maybe it's better to have fewer – **but quality** – friends.

I'm sorry to say that making new friends takes a really, really long time. It happens when you're not looking, when you're busy doing other things. But you still have to put yourself out there. It also requires a lot energy to find and keep new friends. Hopefully the effort is worth it.

Making friends is also about making friends with yourself first. I saw that even if I don't have a friend in the world, I'm still a worthwhile person.

**Published: 24 March 2019**



**By Catherine Heath.** *I'm a community builder for creative and ethical companies. I offer freelance writing services including blogs, copy and documentation. [Find out how we can work together!](#)*

---