

## Getting Along With New Groups

A friend has invited to a small house party. You're good friends with one guy, but now you're meeting him and his buddies out for his birthday. You've just joined a small club where the other members all seem to be know each other. These are scenarios where you want to hit it off with a whole new group of people.

I've both succeeded and failed at this task at various times. When you click with everyone you can have the makings of a new social circle overnight. Or you can make an ass out of yourself and find things are never quite the same with the person who introduced you to the group. Here's some general advice on getting along with a new group the day you meet them, and a little on being accepted into their circle down the road:

### Legitimately click with them

This is one of those social situations where the battle can be over before it starts. If you meet your friend's friends and you naturally have compatible personalities and interests, then you're bound to hit it off with them. It goes the other way as well. If you just don't have much in common with them then you probably won't click. Like I mention in most of the articles on this site, having a base of knowledge and experience that lets you relate to a wide range of people is an asset.

You're at a disadvantage if you're not in a position to talk about the things the group members want to discuss. These could be things such as common interests or life experiences that they assume everyone in the group shares. If you can contribute, you'll find you get along with everyone much more effortlessly. You can't be an expert on every topic, but even having a shallow kind of knowledge about a variety of topics helps. Rather than saying nothing, you can contribute a tidbit or two to the conversation.

Of course groups sometimes also have general skill requirements they expect of their members. Examples would be: "Group members must have a certain level of social skills and coolness", "Group members must be roughly as good as us in the martial art we all train in", or "Group members must be able to keep up with us when we're out having a good time." You can't control everything, but the more well-rounded you are the more easily you can meet these various requirements as they come up.

### Don't be a try hard

I believe there are two kinds of nervousness in social situations. The first is the kind we all know where you feel jittery and physically anxious. I think there's also a more subtle kind where you don't physically feel it but you're nervous enough that you have trouble relaxing and being yourself. You try too hard to portray yourself in a certain way and often end up going over the top and acting like a goofball.

I've done this several times: As the new guy I felt out of place and wanted to make a good impression on everyone. I can be pretty funny so I tried to win people's favor by joking around and making them laugh. At first it worked but I always carried things too far. By the end of the night I was making too many jokes, they were veering into inappropriate territory, and I was getting more misses than hits. I came off looking really lame.

A couple of other times I've tried to show everyone what a fun party animal I was. The result was me drinking too much, saying a bunch of embarrassing things, then getting sick. Weak.

It's easier said than done, but I think the best thing you can do when you're new to the group is just be normal and straight-up with everyone. They're either going to like you on your own merits or not, but trying to force the hand and be something that you're not won't help. Try to resist that gut feeling that no one will accept you unless you come off as super funny, fun, or interesting.

### Be social

I don't know if this is a universal experience among guys like me or not, but a few times I've been hanging around with a group, not saying much, and someone will look at me and straight out say, "Be social." What they meant was for me to participate and be engaged in the group, instead of just physically being there but not contributing or seeming like I'd prefer to be somewhere else.

The formula for 'being social' is simple: figure out what everyone is

doing, go join them, and then participate as well. If you're at a party and everyone is in the backyard talking, then walk over to where they are and take part in the chit-chat. If you're at someone's house and everyone is sitting on the couch playing video games, go sit with them and take your turn when it comes up (even if it's not your favorite game). If you're at a bar and everyone is playing pool, join them and play a game or two (even if you wish they were doing something more fun to you).

That sounds simple, but if you're anything like me your tendency is to either: a) sit down by yourself somewhere and not really talk to anyone, ideally with some excuse to look busy like watching the T.V., petting the owner's cat, or flipping through a magazine, or b) go over to where the group is, but hover on the sidelines and not join in the actual activity. Both those actions send the message that you're not interested in being a part of the group. That may not be your intention, but that's how it can come across. That or you're shy/boring.

Consciously make an effort to be an engaged member of the group. Don't worry too much about sucking either. The fact that you're in there and taking part, and implying an interest in being with everyone, is more important than your skill level when it comes to most fun, trivial activities.

### **Don't be quiet**

When you're around a new group of people it's easier to be the quiet one in the conversation. For one, you're the out of place new person. You truly may not have much to add to the conversation either. And often the group will be referencing certain people and events you know nothing about.

Still, you have to say something. You may not think so but people will notice if you keep silent the entire time. At first sitting back and taking everything in has its place, but sooner or later you have to add your piece to the conversation.

I wrote a fairly quick article on the topic:

[Some Tips On How To Be Less Quiet In Conversations](#)

### **Give everyone a chance even if your first impression of them isn't perfect**

When you first meet a new group of people you're not going to like everyone instantly. One person might be a bit aloof, another may seem too boring, another too dorky, another too bitchy and unfriendly, another too smarmy and into himself. Ignore those first impressions and make a decent effort to be friendly with them all anyways. You may never end up totally hitting it off, but they could also be much cooler than you originally thought once you get to know them. You can't write off everyone based on a smattering of initial negative information. Lonely people often do this though, so be careful about doing so yourself if that's something you struggle with.

### **You don't have to make everyone love you the first time you meet them**

Getting along with everyone is something to shoot for, but you can probably hang around that group again even if some of the people aren't 100% crazy about you, or are indifferent to you. First, you may just not have had time, or the chance, to talk to everyone as much as you'd like in one evening/afternoon/day. Second, it's your first time meeting them so you may be a little nervous, or a lot the conversation will be devoted to basic getting-to-know-you topics. If you see them again they'll have more of a chance to see what you're like.

But even then, some group members may not totally warm up to you. They may come around, or maybe not. But even in more established groups some people like and hang out with each other more than others. Two members may not be that keen about each other but still hang out because of their other mutual friends. If you meet a group of five guys through your friend, eventually become good mates with two of them, only casually know two more, and have the last one not care about you one way or another, you're still fine as long as you can all get along together. You may not talk all that much with the last guy, but on the whole the group works.

### **Get into a larger group one sub-group at a time**

Larger groups naturally take some time to find your place in, and it can be discouraging if you don't realize this. Meeting four of your buddy's friends is one thing, but if you're joining an established club or starting a

job at a busy restaurant with thirty staff members, you can't realistically get in with everyone instantly. In these situations, while everybody might know each other and be on friendly terms, there will be smaller subgroups within the larger one (which is only normal because certain people are more compatible than others or have spent more time together due to their circumstances). Some of these subgroups may be more friendly or cliquish than others.

The subgroup you initially click with can be your 'home base' at first - you at least have some people to chat to and hang out with. At the same time, you're getting to know everyone else, and they're getting used to you. Before long you may get comfortable with the people from other subgroups. In the end, you won't be on equal terms with everyone, but you'll be accepted by the group as a whole. Give it some time and don't get too down on yourself if rapport seems a little strained with some members in the beginning, everything will fall into place eventually.

### **Groups are often quite obvious about what you need to do be accepted**

If you pay attention you can often pick up obvious signs of what you need to do for the group to be cool with you and take you in. In the past I think I unconsciously recognized these signs then decided I either didn't want to, or wasn't able to, meet the requirements. Now when I recognize them I can use them as a shortcut to getting along with everyone.

Signs could be as blatant as someone inviting to join them on a certain activity or mentioning the group often hangs out at a particular place on Friday nights. Perhaps in hindsight you can think of a time when someone extended an invitation like this to you but it went over your head at that moment.

These signs can also take the form of certain activities or interests the members take part in. If a group of guys meet on the weekends to play basketball and talk about music, the message is that you're welcome to come along if you can take part.

On a related note, every group has it's own set of little unwritten rules. Knowing them can be a shortcut to gaining rapport with everyone. They could be little things like the type of jokes that are preferable to make, to more serious stuff.

This advice about recognizing fairly obvious pointers about how people would like you to act can be a more general social skills pointer as well. If you watch for them, lots of social guidelines and expectations are easy to see. You don't have to reinvent the wheel each time when you can often use the information people are giving you.