"Old" undergraduate [1]

Alice,

I am over 26 years old but I still am an undergraduate student. I find myself constantly hanging out with people much younger than I am and I sometimes feel out of place. Is it wrong to hang out with a younger college crowd?

Sincerely,
Old undergraduate

Answer

Dear Old undergraduate,

Wherever you find yourself, having the social support, connection, and fun that comes with having friends is special. Depending on your surroundings, you may have a lot in common with the people you connect with, or you may come from very different backgrounds and life experiences.

It is not wrong to hang out with a younger crowd unless it bothers you. It sounds like, at times, your current situation does bother you. Being friends with a younger group may have its perks. Perhaps it helps you to reclaim a young adulthood that you may have missed out on if you had to go to work right out of high school. Perhaps you serve a sort of mentor-type role for some of these friends. Or perhaps they are just plain fun to be around.

But it may have its drawbacks, too. Perhaps you feel as if they can't fully relate to your experience or perhaps they can't form as deep of a connection with you as you would like. Maybe there are even cultural references that they miss (or that you miss) because of the age differences.

Does it feel like it would benefit you to expand your social circles to include some older students? There are many organizations and clubs that cater to graduate students, and non-traditional undergraduates. Talk to your advisor and ask her or him if there is any particular group within your college for people returning to school after some time in the "real" world. Look for posters on campus or check online for a student organization or activity that you're interested in, attend a meeting, and see if there are any older students there. Find out the spots where graduate students hang out, and go there rather than the usual undergraduate "haunts." You could also try finding a meet-up through meetup.com [2] or other sites for folks with similar interests who fall in your age category.
This doesn't mean that you can't spend time with your classmates, but from your question, it does seem like you could do with expanding your horizons a bit and making some new friends who can complement the ones you already have.

Good luck!

Alice!

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