Dear Alice,

I am twenty-one and have pretty much no friends or no group of people to hang out with on the weekends. Otherwise, my life is full and where I want it to be – loving boyfriend, university, family, etc. I have a few (two or three) friends from my youth that I see twice, maybe three times, a year but that is it. I'm not a wallflower and love to talk to people about anything - I have lots of interests and go out often, but not with any friends. What should I do to meet people my age, on campus? I want to go out to clubs and bars and movies and the rest with some girl/guyfriends other than family and my boyfriend! It's getting lonely.

No friends!

Answer

Dear No friends!,

Making friends may look easy, but as you've found out, it's not so simple. It may be easy to make casual acquaintances, but to really develop a friendship takes time and mutual effort. For some people, making new friends, or sustaining existing relationships, can seem even harder to do when part of a romantic duo.

Wanting platonic relationships is natural. Having multiple friendships provides us with the chance to give and get support, explore different sides of ourselves, hear varying opinions and views, and widen our access to activities and resources. Sitting down and asking yourself some questions about what you're looking for, and why, can help you focus on what you need and how to go about getting it. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Was there a time when you felt satisfied with your social situation?
- If there was, what do you think has changed since then?
- What has made you conscious of this now?
- Has anything changed in your romantic relationship?
- Are you feeling stressed about school or work?
- Is there a family situation you need to talk about?
- If you have stopped hanging out with friends you've had, why?
- Are there particular times when you feel lonely?

Talking with a family member, long-time friend, or counselor could help. Some people become more aware of their desires for friendship when they need to sort through something.
Connecting with someone you trust can help you untangle your feelings and develop some strategies for dealing with them.

For example, many people wonder how to move on from the stage of chatting after class or on the way to the dorm kitchen, to spending time together on off-campus outings or hanging out for dinner and a movie. The likelihood is that those people you find interesting are eager to make friends, too. They may just be having trouble making the first move! You can start by spending time in places where people are likely to share your interests?if you like sports, check out the gym, intramural sports, or the local sports bar. Is sci-fi more your thing? How about that section in the bookstore, the film club, or the science library? No matter what your interests, there are sure to be other people on campus who share them.

Friendship can also develop out of similar beliefs, or simply a mutual interest in getting to know one another. Take a leap and ask! You could suggest a pal from your community service group join you for lunch, or ask your suitemate if s/he would like to check out a new restaurant downtown. While you're hanging out, let the focus naturally bounce back and forth between you and your new friend. An important part of developing relationships is listening and expressing interest in the other person, while also sharing something of yourself.

Sometimes, people involved in romantic relationships worry that if they hang out "too much" with other people, their partner will get jealous or see it as a personal affront. Ask yourself if this is a dynamic between you and your boyfriend. If it is, talking with him can help. Let him know that you care about him and value what you have together, but also need other social outlets. Getting together with friends doesn't take away from your relationship. Rather, it can add to it by widening your perspective, strengthening your self-confidence, and expanding your circle of mutual friends. Maybe you can arrange for one evening a week to be "friends" night?where you arrange to go out to dinner or visit a museum, or whatever interests you, with a new person you have met, while your boyfriend does the same. Once every couple of weeks, you can meet up and go out all together.

For more ideas, read the archived questions on Friendship in the Go Ask Alice! Relationship category!

Good luck!

Alice!

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