

Forming and Maintaining Relationships in College



In the spirit of Valentine's day coming up this month, it is fitting to investigate the various relationships that you may form while you are in college. As you begin the second semester of college, you may have already made several friends in your classes and clubs. If you are living on your college's campus, you may have a roommate(s) that you share your space with throughout the week. You may have a significant other from home or a new person that you have started dating while you have been in college. All of these are different types of relationships that you may form throughout your college experience. Let's investigate the various ways you can meet new friends, maintain those relationships, and learn how to mitigate conflict amongst those relationships.

Meeting New Friends

If you are new student in college, you are likely not used to having to make new friends as you have had the same peers for most of your life. It can be an adjustment having to “relearn” how to make friends, but there are many easy things that you can do to jumpstart the process.



1. Join a Club on Campus

Colleges offer many different clubs – you are sure to find one that interests you (i.e. Student Government, Student Programming Boards, Foreign Language Clubs, Academic Clubs, Community Outreach Clubs).

2. Talk to the Student Sitting Next to You in Class

If you are having trouble making friends outside of academics, start getting to know your classmates. You may end up having more in common with them than just your class subject.

3. Go to Social Events Held by the College

Events are a great way to get to know people that you go to school with. Sign up for that roller-skating outing or trivia night – you just might meet some great people!

4. Attend Sporting Events

Cheer on your classmates on the sidelines with other students – show that school spirit!

5. Go to Study Hall with Your Classmates

Studying with a big group of your classmates can build relationships through struggling and succeeding together. Think of them as your teammates!

6. Pick a Major that Interests You and Make Friends Within Your Major

Choosing the perfect major for your career after college will also set you up with other students who have similar interests. You will be spending a lot of time with these same students during your time in college, so you will get to know them very well.

Maintaining Existing Relationships



If you are a returning college student, you may have established a solid friend group during your first year or two of college. These friendships have several benefits such as

providing a social life outside of school, educational support, and relationships that will last beyond college. Just like any relationship, friendships do require a lot of work to maintain. You have to put in the effort to show your friends, partners, or roommates that you care about them. A few things that you can do to ensure that you are being a good friend or partner can consist of:

1. Reach-Out

Call, text, or reach-out to them on social media platforms to catch up on the latest events happening in their lives.

2. Check-Up on Them

Ask them how they have been, how school is going, how their family is doing, etc. Your check-up could mean the world to someone who is struggling privately.

3. Make Plans

Plan a trip to the mall, go out for dinner one night, go to the movie theater – spend time together!

4. Deep Conversations

Having deeper conversations with your friends can allow for you to connect more to them and strengthen your bond.

5. Communication When You Don't See Eye to Eye

Communicating your frustrations with your friends can be very tricky and hard to do – especially if you do not want to hurt their feelings. It is important to learn how to effectively communicate so you can avoid resentment.

Addressing Conflict and Compromising



By Frits Ahlefeldt

In addition to the benefits of having relationships in college, there may come a time when conflict arises amongst friends, roommates, or significant others.

- **How do you confront a friend about plagiarizing your Literature essay?**
- **What do you do when you have an exam in the morning, and your roommate is watching *The Bachelor* as loud as the TV will go at midnight?**
- **How do you tell your significant other that you are upset with them for not making time for you?**

Learning how to navigate through these disagreements is an important skill to have, so let's look at the steps to peaceful conflict resolution:

1. Before You Begin, Ask Yourself Why You Feel Upset

What is the immediate issue at hand? Think of how this issue made you feel and label those emotions.

2. Discuss One Issue at a Time

Pick one issue and discuss it in its entirety before moving to another.

3. No Degrading Language

Do not attack the other person's character or try to belittle them in the argument with name-calling or slander.

4. Express Your Feelings with Words and Take Responsibility for Them

Let the other person know exactly what upset you and explain to them how their actions made you feel.

5. Take Turns Talking

Make sure to never interrupt the other person when they are talking to ensure that both parties are heard.

6. No Stonewalling

Do not refuse to speak or answer the other person's questions during the conversation. No problems will be solved if you do not participate in the journey to a compromise.

7. Take a Time-Out if Things Get Too Heated

If the conversation starts to escalate to anger and yelling, take a minute to regroup and come back to the conversation when both parties have had time to cool off.

8. Attempt to Come to a Compromise or Understanding

Try to reach a mutual understanding to resolve any problems that came between you and your friend, roommate, or partner.

(Adapted from Therapist Aid: "Fair Fighting Rules")

As scary as it may seem to be submerged into college when you do not know anyone, it is also a very rewarding experience. You meet different people and form relationships that can last a lifetime. You learn a lot about yourself during this time, and having a good group of friends will help you through this period of self-discovery. Ultimately, college is a time that many people experience personal growth, and having strong relationships with your peers, roommates, and partners can help foster that growth.