



 CynthiaSpillman

Get Back Out There

Re-engaging the Muscles of Meeting New People and Making Friends

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all aspects of life, love and loss

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The effects of Covid on our social lives

The Covid-19 pandemic has knocked all of us sideways, in one way or another. We suddenly had to go from the principle that “no man/woman is an island” – to cutting ourselves off from the most basic contact with the human species. It’s therefore perfectly understandable that getting back into the swing of social activities and relationships may feel strange. After all, the Covid song may be over, but as Groucho Marx said, “the malady lingers on”. So how do we begin to put our social toe back in the water? I aim to give you a few pointers as to how you can increase your confidence and get back out there again.

Safety

Once upon a time, we lived in a world where masks, hand gels and social distancing were alien to us. The pandemic changed all of that and now we must learn to re-engage with our fellow man and woman – whilst also keeping ourselves safe. When I use the word “safe”, I refer to all manner of this. Make no mistake, Covid has added one more, unwelcome layer to what can already be challenging – meeting new people. Lockdown may be over, but Covid isn’t.

The points here apply to whether you’re meeting in person and/or online.

Physical safety

This isn't just about masks and hand gels, but also about how we keep ourselves safe in multiple ways. After so much self-isolation, it's important to go really slowly when we re-enter "planet socialising". You may think things are back to normal, but actually, the old normal has gone. My advice is to take it step by step. Questions you might like to consider are:

- 👤 How do you deal with a prospective new friend or partner if they're not vaccinated and you are?
- 👤 How much do you disclose about yourself? Oversharing is dangerous. Never divulge anything about your financial or personal circumstances until you feel that you know your new friend well – and even then – tread carefully.
- 👤 Always tell somebody where you are and ask them to call or text you so that you can confirm that you're okay.
- 👤 Meet your new connection in a public place and tell someone where you are before you go. There's safety in numbers.
- 👤 Don't give out your contact details, unless you are 100% confident that this is the right course of action. There's no rush!
- 👤 If you feel in any way uncomfortable, get up and leave. Trust your instincts. If you smell a rat, the chances are that you're in the company of one!

Rebuilding your confidence in social situations

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will your social life or prospective relationship be, either. It's natural to feel a bit wobbly after so much isolation. Take it in baby steps. Remind yourself of previous occasions when you had to take your courage in both hands and put yourself out there. There's no right or wrong way of re-engaging. You may feel that you're the only one who's feeling vulnerable, but you're not.

Don't get fooled by what I refer to as "Impostor Syndrome". That's the negative inner chatter which we all have which tells us that we're rubbish, or that we don't deserve a new relationship, be it platonic or romantic. Speak to yourself as you would to a dear friend. You're not less deserving of compassion, so act accordingly! If you'd feel more comfortable going with a friend into new social situations, that's absolutely fine.

Nothing changes if nothing changes

Prince or Princess Charming, or your new best friend, won't just show up on your doorstep. You've got to get out there and search for them. It takes effort, commitment and courage. People are everywhere and many of them feel just as awkward as you do! Push yourself to go out. Accept social invitations. Instead of having a coffee at home, go to your local coffee shop. If you feel overwhelmed, then write down on a piece of paper three ways in which you've overcome "nerves" in the past. Remind yourself of situations where you've triumphed or acted courageously. It's worth putting in the effort, so again, do it in bite-size chunks, but DO it!

The art of good conversation

Instead of obsessing about how you look or how you're coming over, or fearing you'll dry up in conversation, concentrate on the other person. Ask lots of open-ended questions. Don't interrupt and look interested – even if you're not! Fake it to make it! I'm a big believer in mindfulness in relationships. You don't have to morph into a meditating guru. Just taking a few deep breaths can do wonders to quell your anxiety. Avoid topics such as sex, religion and politics until you know the person a whole lot better. Even talking about Covid and the vaccine might best be avoided in the early stages of a new friendship or relationship. If the other person doesn't ask you lots of questions, then this could be a good indicator that they're not really interested in you and if that's the case – move on swiftly!

Managing expectations

They say that expectations are resentments in construction. In my years of date coaching, the one thing I observed strongly was that most people have relationship expectations way in excess of reality.

This also applies to the expectations we have of ourselves. I've done it myself. Before I met my third husband Peter, I had a list of "non-negotiables" of what I wanted in a partner. I certainly didn't "do" beards and bald patches. I had a certain "type" of man which, in reality, proved to be my downfall.

Guess what? Peter has a beard and bald patch and I adore it! I can spot him from the back of any aircraft when I return from the loo, and no longer nearly end up sitting on top of the wrong man in row 12C! Joking apart, the point I'm making is that you should keep an open mind and not having a shopping list of impossibly high standards. Meet that person and let the magic begin to work – or not. Don't write them off immediately because they don't have a certain "look".

Where to go to meet new people

I'm a firm believer in networking. Everybody knows somebody. Don't be afraid to ask for an introduction to somebody you like the look or sound of. With the internet, these days the world is your oyster. What a wonderful resource we have at our fingertips 24/7.

Below are some suggestions which you might like to investigate:

- 👤 Reach out to friends you've lost touch with
- 👤 Join local groups on social media
- 👤 Separate yourself from society's stigma – you're never too old to make new friends!
- 👤 Strike up a conversation in a fitness class
- 👤 Join a book club
- 👤 Join your local community garden
- 👤 Make friends with people you see in non-social contexts – e.g., your dentist, your vet, your personal trainer etc

- 👤 Put a smile on your face and say hi to strangers!
- 👤 Reach out to friends of friends
- 👤 RSVP "yes"! If you're invited to an event, and there's a spark of interest, accept! Don't listen to that negative voice!
- 👤 Volunteer. What a wonderful way to not only meet new people, but in helping them you're also helping yourself
- 👤 Get a pet. If you can afford one and you have the necessary resources and time, then animals are a fabulous way of meeting new people. They're also incredibly therapeutic and are giving, loyal stress-relievers
- 👤 Continue your education at a local college. Life is full of second and more, chances. It's never too late
- 👤 Travel alone. It's an amazing way to have next exciting adventures, gives you plenty to talk about and will expand you as a person in so many ways. And if you don't fancy it, then join an organisation which caters for single people
- 👤 Sign up for a crafting group. Men can also do it!
- 👤 Show up at local events. Your community is a great resource
- 👤 Pay a stranger a compliment and watch their face light up!
- 👤 Say "yes" to friends when they invite you out
- 👤 Join a supper club
- 👤 Join a dating site

Be consistent but also don't make heavy weather of it all. Maintain a light-hearted approach. Any relationship takes effort to begin and maintain. If you want to both make and keep new friends, then you must make a conscious effort. Get out there! Check-in on people by text to ask how they are. Invite your new friends over for a coffee, once you feel safe enough to do this. The more you nurture your relationships, the more they'll flourish. It's really worth the effort. We may still be recovering from the pandemic, but don't let your heart remain in lockdown. There's always hope and never any reason, but plenty of excuses, for not living your best life!

Further resources

www.cynthiaspillmanwriter.com – my website

cynthia@cynthiaspillmanwriter.com – contact me via email

twitter.com/CynthTellsIt – me on Twitter

www.bennionkearny.com/book/senior-dating-from-dinner-date-to-soulmate-cynthia-spillman-book-ebook-on-mature-dating – my book on dating

www.mirthy.co.uk – Mirthy – online events to help you discover, learn and connect

www.spiceuk.com – Spice UK – group activities for singletons

www.markwarner.co.uk – Mark Warner – holidays for singletons

www.abia.org.uk – Association of British Introduction Agencies – the authoritative voice of the introduction agency sector

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk – bereavement support

www.gingerbread.org.uk – lone parent support

www.happysteps.co.uk – resources for stepfamilies

www.relate.org.uk – national support which offers counselling for every type of relationship.

www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness – mindfulness meditation – for information on reputable and accredited courses

www.hotcourses.com – a comprehensive list of thousands of general interest courses, nationwide