

Small Talk Is Painful

MAKING SMALL TALK is a critical life skill and the foundation for all friendships.

A conversation can increase your level of intimacy with someone. Small talk allows you to see if you have mutual interests and to get a sense of who they are and what they like. It can introduce you to a new person and help someone get to know you. It sets people at ease, can help pass the time, and creates a segue in meetings to the main event.

Chit-chat between classes, in hallways, at sports venues, after meetings, and in small groups provides a chance to make a connection, to get to know someone, and to gain the information you need to nurture a friendship.

Small talk can be the Achilles heel for people with ADHD, however.

Some find small talk boring, while others find it mystifying or even terrifying. People with ADHD may struggle with recognizing how to start a conversation. Or they may dive right into sharing personal information after a quick chat about the weather.

Anyone with ADHD can learn the skill of making chit-chat. Here are some tips that can help.

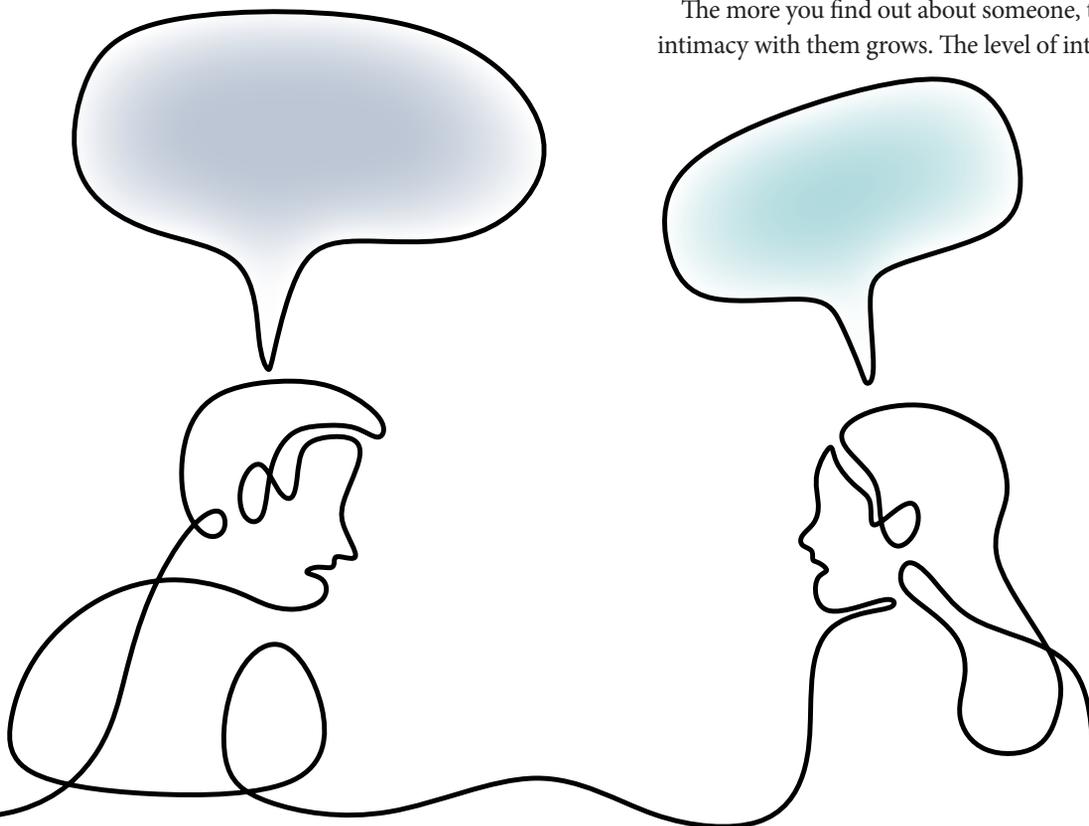
Instead of thinking of small talk as hard, daunting, boring, or unnecessary, consider yourself an ambassador of friendship. In this role, you are helping someone learn more about you and feel comfortable. This can begin to nurture a relationship. Relationships are not formed overnight, and each interaction allows you to bond, to get to know someone better, and to grow the connection.

Five ways to strengthen your small-talk muscle

1. Who is your audience?

Consider who you are speaking with and what your relationship is with this person. Are they a friendly stranger, an acquaintance, a coworker? Review past patterns and experiences to help you better understand them and to predict how they might react. What is your level of intimacy with this person? What do you know about them? What is your relationship with them?

The more you find out about someone, the more your intimacy with them grows. The level of intimacy



coincides with trust and knowledge of past experiences with this person. By sharing your insights, experiences, and dreams with someone, you build trust.

2. *Build on the comments of the other speaker.*

Each comment builds on the last comment and thus starts a conversation. Asking a question to learn more about what the person just said is another way to build a conversation. For instance, if someone says they love this time of year, add your comment while also asking what they have been up to and what they do for fun during that season. Now you are not only chatting, but you are also finding out about them.

Practice staying on topic or noting if the other speaker is staying on topic or veering off. With children, try using Jenga to demonstrate. Each time your child builds on a topic, he or she can add a Jenga piece to make a Jenga tower. This gives the child a visual representation of how a conversation grows.

3. *Be curious.*

Without making your conversations an interrogation, ask questions to keep the conversation going. Inquire what makes the other person prefer a Youtube video, or what makes them say they dislike a teacher. Ask questions, such as “Can you tell me more about that?” “What was that like?” “How was that?” Make comments that encourage the other person, such as “Oh, that’s interesting.” “Mmm, I don’t know about that, I would love to know more.” “I noticed that about that situation.” “I hear you.”

4. *Start with social spy.*

If you are at a loss on what to talk about with someone you run into often, or someone with whom you want to build a friendship, consider covertly watching them. Listen and observe what they talk about with others, what they read, what

clubs they are members of, and what sports they play. When you come from a place of really trying to find out more about the person, then you have a reason to talk. Use chit-chat and questions to find out what they like and are interested in.

Spy on other reciprocal conversations to have a model of what staying on topic looks like and how other people make chit-chat. Rather than seeing this as impossible, observe and notice what they do so you can imitate the process.

5. *Practice.*

Small talk centers around listening, responding, and curiosity. Listening intently is not easy for people with ADHD, but it is important. Practice the elements of making chit-chat and eye contact. Work on listening and reading body language to see signs that the other person wants to continue talking. Ask close friends, your partner, or family members to help you practice. Give yourself a mission to practice once a day. Building up a conversation takes practice, so try to make practice fun.

SO, RATHER THAN THINKING of small talk as boring or pointless, remind yourself that every form of conversation has a different purpose and that small talk is beneficial to both you and your partner. 🗨️



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