

# How to Make Being Social Less Boring

**W**HY IS IT SO HARD for people with ADHD to socialize?

Do you find that getting together with friends and family is rewarding, yet you put it at the end of your to-do pile? Do you gladly accept invitations, yet rarely organize social situations? Do you regret losing relationships by not reaching out, not replying, and forgetting to show up?

One reason why people with ADHD don't reach out or organize gatherings is that the level of effort required to do so is time-consuming. And frankly, it isn't stimulating.

Seeking stimulation is very common for those of us with ADHD. Our brain wiring is different than it is for neurotypical folks, and we don't feel pleasure, reward, or motivation the way they do. Neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, are released in smaller amounts, and we tend to feel less satisfied internally so we often seek external stimulation. When we are stimulated, the executive functioning in brains seems to work well.

Boredom can play a key role in ADHD symptoms, such as:

- **Inattention.** When we're bored, we lose focus, forget details, daydream, lose ourselves in our own words, and make careless mistakes.

- **Impulsivity.** If we're feeling bored, we may tune in to things that have nothing to do with the task at hand—such as an incoming text, discussions among other people, or a squirrel hanging from a bird feeder.

- **Hyperactivity.** Boredom makes it hard for us to sit still and cope, causing agitation or making us feel as if we are going to jump out of our skin. We may find ourselves heading to the bathroom or cafeteria even if we don't have a reason to go there.

Can you identify what stimulates you? What interests you may not interest me. Stimulation comes from novelty for some of us, while others are more stimulated by a sport or talent they are trying to master. Generally speaking, stimulation for people with ADHD often includes risk-taking, problem-solving, speed, urgency, multitasking, and recognition.



What satisfies you? Think back to what you liked as a child. Was it drawing, sports, helping others, playing a musical instrument, painting, playing with younger kids, or getting your hands dirty?

## Ten Ways to Work with Your ADHD Brain If You Want to Be More Social

Boredom affects people with ADHD in more pronounced ways than it does in those who don't have the condition. When you find a task such as reaching out to people boring, try to incorporate something that stimulates you.

**1. Diagnose.** When do you feel socializing is worth it? When do you feel like you are not bored? Who has to be there? What has to be going on? What did you need in the past in order to feel that being social is stimulating rather than boring?

**2. Set up your environment.** People with ADHD are often affected by sensory input to a greater degree than people without ADHD. Use this to your advantage; listen to the music or podcast that gets you intellectually or physically stimulated and enjoy a snack or drink while texting or emailing others.

**3. Turn it into a game.** Gamify your social engagement; listen keenly and then gamify that listening to make it a game. During the next office party or neighborhood barbecue, notice the number of people who tell you their credentials, count the number of times someone says the same thing, and so on.

**4. Make it automatic.** "Operationalize" it by setting up standing fun and social activities. This is much easier, and more natural, than having to reach out or schedule social time.

**5. Multitask.** Those of us who have ADHD like to do two or more things at the same time. Why not call a friend while doing the dishes, walking the dog, or

commuting to work? Anchor this by making it a regular activity, such as "When I do dishes, then I will call people."

**6. Make it urgent.** Many people with ADHD also thrive on time limits in order to start a boring task. Harness the dopamine rush of urgency and pretend that your friend will catch on fire if you don't send out a message immediately.

**7. Offer an alternative.** When someone asks you to do something that feels too boring and you feel that lack of motivation, have a list of things in your back pocket that you could do instead. Or even suggest tweaks to the plan that might make it feel worth it. Would a different venue help? Would it be better to go hiking and then to coffee? Would it be better for you if you are physically moving, encounter fewer crowds, or if there are more people you know?

**8. Do it with a friend.** If you find writing notes, texts, and emails to be boring, consider doing it with a friend. Having a body double is an invaluable way to beat boredom. Your friend can be doing the same task, something else, or nothing at all. Just chatting and laughing can help make it more stimulating.

**9. Make it fun.** Adding humor makes it more fun for you and the recipient. Crack a joke, remind them of something funny that happened years ago, or write in rhyme. Turn it into a competition: imagine that you will be judged and awarded a hefty prize for the most clever or funny text.

**10. Make it hands-on.** If you are someone who gets stimulated by using your hands, consider making your social engagements tactile. Hands-on activities, such as painting pictures or making pottery while drinking wine or going to a dog park, give you something to do—and therefore an excuse around which to host your social engagement.

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### SOCIALIZING PROVIDES MANY BENEFITS.

Even if spending time with people drains you, it's important to find social activities that help recharge your energy and make you feel connected. In-person is best, but connecting via technology also works.

Socializing can have a dramatic, positive effect on your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Socializing not only frees us from feelings of loneliness, but it also helps to sharpen our memory and cognitive skills, increases our sense of happiness and wellbeing, and may even help us live longer. 🧠



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