

## **Making Small Talk**

Many people, particularly those who are shy, feel that making small talk is either too difficult, or unnecessary because it is seen as too superficial. However, small talk is an essential part of conversations, particularly when meeting new people, and will allow us to move on to the more intimate conversations and connections we are looking for.

Try the following strategies to improve your small talk skills.

### **1. Begin With Setting Talk**

Setting talk includes any statements that point out or question someone about common elements of the setting you are in. Such comments as “Nice day, isn’t it?” or “It’s stuffy in here.”, will establish contact with another person and orient you to the other person. Keep setting talk to a minimum however, since it is only meant to stimulate our initial connection with someone.

### **2. Initiate Name Exchange**

There is a window of opportunity at the beginning of a conversation when exchanging names is natural and polite. It shows the other person you are interested in getting to know them. Name exchange becomes more difficult as time goes on.

### **3. Develop A Topic of Conversation**

Fish around for something to talk about, by asking questions like “What kind of work do you do?” or “How do you know the host of the party?”. If one topic doesn’t lead to a more extensive conversation, offer another. Remember, if a person isn’t interested in a topic, it doesn’t mean they aren’t interested in you. Read the newspaper or watch the news to generate potential topics of conversation.

### **4. Focus On The Response You Get**

Be sensitive to how the other person is responding, both in terms of what they say and their non-verbal response (i.e., eye contact, signs of interest, blushing, smiles or nodding). Don’t focus on your irrational fears of embarrassment, disapproval, or rejection.

**5. Take Turns In The Conversation**

**Fulfilling conversations involve a back and forth exchange, where each statement feeds on the next. Pick up on the other person's ideas and expand on these, or express your feelings related to them.**

**6. Include Self-Disclosure**

**Confident people work at matching the other persons level of self-disclosure. This moves the conversation beyond the common elements of the immediate situation you are in. Shy people tend to disclose personal information either far too quickly, or more often too slowly. Increasing self-disclosure is necessary to develop a connection and ultimately a friendship.**

**7. Manage Silences**

**Realize that some silence in conversations are normal and natural. Extensive silences however become awkward and can be dealt with easily by asking an open-ended question, making a comment or by offering a new topic. This shows the other person you are taking equal ownership for the conversation.**

**8. Elaborate On Your Answers**

**Simple "yes" and "no" answers, leave little room for the conversation to develop, or to create a sense of connection.**

**9. Avoid Your Favorite Topics**

**Talking about your favorite topic may be fine if the other person you are talking to also enjoys it and shows signs of interest. But if not, it can do more harm than good, particularly if you go on at length and you aren't sensitive to the other persons response.**

**10. Expand Your Topic Options**

**Don't be afraid to talk about topics you don't know about, as long as you are interested. This is a chance to learn something new, by asking lots of questions. Admit that you don't know much about the topic, your honesty will be appreciated.**

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