

Making Friends Requires Confidence

... and that is tough for people with ADHD

SOCIAL CONFIDENCE does not always come easily to people with ADHD. Making new friends, reaching out to people, and trying new things requires some level of confidence. Making jokes, chatting with people, or joining a new activity all depend on feeling confident enough to try. If you're telling a joke, you have to start with the belief that the joke will land. You have to believe on some level that you are funny. And you have to believe that engaging with others will be beneficial and reciprocal.

A confident mindset is feeling comfortable in your own skin. It's feeling that you are wanted, that you belong, and it's feeling good about who you are and believing in your own abilities.

Feeling confident can feel like a heavy lift for many people, however. Adding ADHD to the mix can make it even more challenging because of all your memories and experiences of things "not going well."

If this is your story, chances are you are missing the most important ingredients for confidence—belief in yourself and belief that everything can work out. Your sense of self-acceptance and belief in yourself has likely been diluted by the times when you didn't feel accepted or you lacked belief in yourself.

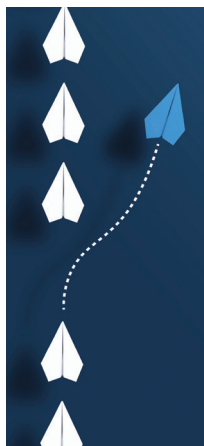
This can happen in an instant. One look, comment, or misplaced remark can knock you off your game and push you right back into your cocoon where it's easier to avoid things than face them. This is especially true when you're not sure what to do to make things better.

Confidence is not actually about your abilities, it's about **your belief in your abilities**.

To join new activities, ask someone to get coffee, chat with someone after soccer practice, or ask someone to collaborate on a project, you have to exert yourself to try to do small and big things.

So, at the core of finding friends, finding community, and finding true belonging is a paradox: You must have confidence in order to try, to go, or to join in—and yet often that's the very thing that's lacking or missing altogether.

So, what do you do? How can people with ADHD become more confident? Start by working with your brain



and your own unique gifts. These are the things that make you special in your own right. Maybe you're a great artist, or you love anime, or you have athletic ability. Building confidence begins by seeing what is working and starting there.

Here are five ways to build self-confidence working with your ADHD, not against it.

1. Embrace your strengths.

It's easy to focus on your weaknesses and to have those negative thoughts become the soundtrack for your actions. Do something that reminds you of your strengths every day. Interest is key to igniting the ADHD brain and helping you move forward.

Friendship should bring out the best version of you, and it's your strengths that contribute to your positive qualities. Ask yourself, *How can I rely on my strengths? How will my strengths help with this dilemma?*

2. Narrate your wins in social settings, not your losses.

If you're like many people with ADHD, it's common to let your inner self-talk become the "truth" of your life. It feels familiar to get into your "default" mode of listening to your strong negative thoughts as they chatter away inside of your mind when you attempt to do something new like being social. The antidote to this is to *pay attention to the positive*.

Paying attention to the positive is the pathway to achieving more positive results. When you work purposefully on paying attention to your wins, you develop a more positive lens that you can access when you try something new. This is how you develop confidence and a stronger belief in yourself.

3. Take smaller risks and then build on them.

Feeling that things can work out is a mindset that takes time. And often the steps required to meet new people and make new friends are daunting. This is especially true when you try to tap into a well of confidence that does

not have enough of a reservoir to give you the boost you need to make your new steps take root.

The key to making this work is to take more microsteps to build your confidence. When you do this, you achieve smaller wins over time, and over time those can grow into bigger wins. Think of it like this: Start by saying hello to someone, then build to asking them to sit with you at lunch.

4. **Picture your positive moments.**

Seeing yourself in the most positive light involves reflecting on positive moments when you feel confident, at your best, and capable of relying on your own abilities. This kind of mindfulness exercise can help you as you focus your attention on what you want to accomplish in your life.

As a person with ADHD, it's often easier (or more familiar) to dip into your negative memories and think about what went wrong. But when you picture yourself in the “positive” you reinforce what you want to create for your future—and that mindset is critical for taking on new tasks, especially ones that make you feel vulnerable like making a new friend.

5. **Surround yourself with supportive people.**

Life is simply easier when you have people around you who champion you. Having people in your inner circle who support you, understand you, and see your strengths even when you do not is key to building confidence. This is how you build your inner resistance to the zingers that life can throw your way.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE is a practice, not an exercise. Practice these five techniques as you explore new people and areas in your life that you're drawn to but feel like a challenge to get to. The trick is to go slow, stay positive, and take small steps that lead to big returns. **A**



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