



Finding YOUR PEOPLE

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Dr Marny Lishman
PSYCHOLOGIST

place to nurture friendships,” Phoebe says. “For example, it’s unlikely you’d ask someone from your pilates class for coffee. Even your work mates may not be the friends you’ll keep for life, because they’re often situational.”

Dr Lishman says while friendships can develop organically, sometimes you need to be more intentional.

“Be proactive in inviting people to things and saying yes to events,” she says. “Engage in things you love — whether it’s a hobby or a team sport — and sometimes you’ll find like-minded people.”

She also recommends reconnecting with old friends.

“Even if you haven’t seen someone in a while and just have their number or connect on Facebook, you might find that once you start chatting again, you still feel a strong, warm connection,” Dr Lishman says.

Exercising your ‘friendship muscle’

Phoebe says while plucking up the courage to put yourself out there socially can be daunting at first, forming and maintaining friendships is like exercising a muscle.

“We often neglect our ‘friendship muscle’ as we’re raising kids and busy with careers,” she says.

“But when you start to work it — thinking of conversation starters and things you can talk about that gets those moments of connection going — it becomes a natural process and you get better at it.”

While shared values are important to a solid friendship, Phoebe says ultimately, a good friend is someone who will be there for you through thick and thin.

“We all face tough times, so you need to have someone on the other end of the phone who will support us when the chips are down, as well as having that person to celebrate the good times with, who will be genuinely proud and happy for you,” she says.

“When you find the people that empower you and make you feel amazing, they’re the ones that you hang on to.”

How reaching out can change things around

With her kids no longer at school, and working from home, Sarah, 56, began feeling lonely and isolated.

When she joined a platform designed for women over 50 to form long-lasting friendships, she immediately hit it off with another member and now has five to six new friends she catches up with regularly and feels she can fully trust and depend on.

“I wouldn’t have formed these connections outside of (the platform),” Sarah says. “Despite living in the same district and frequenting local coffee shops, I never had the opportunity to truly connect.”

“(It) has given me a sense of purpose. I’ve come out of my shell and now have women I can enjoy outings with, whether it’s dinner or the movies.”



When criminal lawyer Lauren Cassimatis was on maternity leave caring for her two small children, she felt a sense of disconnection from the legal world she had spent years building her career in.

“Of course, I love my children and spending time with them but I didn’t feel like me, just being at home full time,” Lauren recalls.

Chatting to other women in her profession, Lauren realised she wasn’t alone, so in 2018 she created a social and wellbeing group now known as Connecting Lawyer Mums.

“It gives people opportunities to find like-minded connection and support each other from a career and wellbeing point of view,” Lauren says.

The group now has 7500 members Australia-wide and organises events including “paint and sip” activities, luncheons and day spa outings.

“It now includes men and non-parents, and has grown into a community where we can chat, laugh, vent. And even though we are focused on our career and ambition, it’s not just about the law, it’s about us as humans,” Lauren says.

“Members want to feel a bit glamorous and pampered.

“We have an annual gala awards night, and this year we’re planning a retreat.”

Humans naturally crave connection but finding the people who truly ‘get’ us isn’t always easy. Here’s how to build real, meaningful friendships

Words Claire Burke

Ever met someone and immediately felt like you just “clicked”? And before long, you were spilling some of your innermost thoughts and feelings because, with this person, you just knew they were on your page.

You might not be able to pinpoint exactly why you connect with certain people and not others, but psychologist Dr Marny Lishman says forming deep, genuine relationships with others is critical to our wellbeing.

“Human beings thrive when they have a sense of belonging, when they have people who they can talk to, debrief with, learn from, get physical and psychological support from,” Dr Lishman says.

According to the Victorian Government’s Better Health Channel website, strong relationships are linked to health benefits.

They can help reduce anxiety and depression, strengthen immunity, help you recover from illness and even help you live longer.

Older people who have strong relationships are more likely to have a better quality of life, the website adds.

According to a 2023 State of the Nation report, about one-third of Australians say they feel lonely. That doesn’t always mean they’re alone or don’t have friends.

This feeling can also be emotional loneliness, which is a lack of deep, close emotional connection with others.

Why we do and don’t connect

Just as we are wired to want and need others around us, it is also human nature to not necessarily mesh with everyone, Dr Lishman says.

“It comes down to the way we’ve grown up, our different social and cultural backgrounds,” she says. “We’ve all got different values, beliefs, personalities and experiences. Quite naturally we’re drawn to people who are quite similar to us — like attracts like.”

While as children, forming a bond with others is quite simple, Dr Lishman says as adults we become more guarded. “Our lives get so busy, we don’t always nurture our friendships and they drop off,” she says.

Strategies that may help

Finding “your people” is not always easy, acknowledges Phoebe Adams, the previous head of a women’s friendship platform, who now works to promote a mental health and fitness charity.

“Not every environment is a suitable

