

How to Start a Conversation

Remember to S.M.I.L.E. By Go-To Mom Tonya Jesienouski, St. George, UTAH

One of the most challenging things about meeting new people is knowing what to say in those first few awkward moments. We've all had the experience of meeting someone and feeling as though they might be good "friend" material, only to find ourselves at a loss as to how to break the ice.

In fact, the term "ice-breaker," by definition, is a game or activity designed to break down that invisible barrier between people in social situations. We all have our barriers. Fortunately, we don't have to go so far as to keep a copy of "Get to Know You Bingo" in our wallets, but it doesn't hurt to have a few ideas to get a conversation going between new acquaintances.

All you have to do is smile -- and **S.M.I.L.E.**:

Start with your situation. Consider what brought you together in the first place. Are you both bringing your kids to the park for playtime? Are you both volunteering at the school? Do you shop at the same store and run into each other regularly? Make a mental list of some of the things you already know about your potential friend, and then think of some things you want to know.

Make the first move. Don't wait for other people to approach you. Be confident and take the initiative. I don't think anyone has ever been offended by a sincere offer of friendship.

Introduce yourself. Don't forget to exchange names, and even numbers, if the situation permits. I have forgotten this simple step many times and it's always very embarrassing to go back, especially after a good conversation, and admit your mistake. It's also easy to get nervous and worry so much about what to talk about that you forget why you are talking.

Let them talk. After you have introduced yourself and committed yourself to remember names, you can dig into your bag of questions (see step one) and let your new friend do the talking.

It's always tempting to try to steer the conversation toward yourself because that's probably when you feel most comfortable; you want to let the other person know what a great person you are so that they'll like you.

Instead, when you spend your time showing genuine interest in another person, you'll have shown what a great friend can be without saying too much about yourself.

Expect great things. Whether meeting new people is a challenge to you or whether you are a social butterfly, when you make the effort to invest in a friendship you will reap great rewards. And the best thing: With each new attempt, you will gain the confidence you need to talk to people with ease.