



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
by **Keri Forbess-McCorquodale, MS, LPC, LMFT, CEAP**

How to Talk to Anyone about Anything

I love “people watching” – you know, just observing people interacting with one another. For example, I was at a party recently. As usual, there were a certain number of people who were clearly uncomfortable in the social situation. I can always spot them – they hang out on the outer edges of the room, or they sit at a table when most people are standing and visiting. Should someone approach them to attempt a conversation, our uncomfortable friends will typically give a brief answer then look away.

Why is it that some people never meet a stranger, while others hate all social events? Sure, there are some personality traits that influence this – some people are naturally shy and anxious when in public. However, I have found that you can overcome your shyness with a little work. Here are some tips:

Eye Contact. Begin to look people in the eyes – when you’re passing them in the hall at work, the grocery store, or wherever. The more you practice this, the more comfortable you’ll be with it. Looking down is a dead giveaway that you lack confidence or feel “less than” the person you are coming into contact with.

Smile and Say “Hi” First. I experiment with this all the time.

I wait until the last possible second to see if the person coming towards me will: 1. Look at me and 2. Speak to me. If they don’t, sometimes I will force the issue by speaking to them. Speaking first is along the same lines as the eye contact – it lets the other person know you are confident and comfortable (even if you’re not 100% convinced of that yourself). Quit waiting for others to include you – jump in!

Introduce Yourself. It really is okay to walk up to people you don’t know and begin a conversation. The way you do this is by introducing yourself and asking their name. This is also a great trick if you can’t remember someone’s name whom you’ve met before: “I know we’ve met before. My name is _____, please remind me of yours.”

Ask Questions. Now, this is the real trick to feeling comfortable in social situations. Get others to start talking about themselves! After all, we are typically our own favorite subjects (plus, now you’re not in the hot seat). How is he connected to the event you are attending? How long has she known your host? What does he/she do for a living? Children? Pets? Hobbies?

Stay in the Comfort Zone. Avoid hot topics that lead to opinions – religion, politics, etc. Even

though those topics might be more fun to you, and you enjoy seeing people squirm a little, you will quickly become known as a person lacking social skills. Save those discussions for close friends, not new acquaintances.

Find a Connection. While asking the questions, look for things you might have in common with the other person. Do you know someone in his/her field? Are your children close in age (which can lead to hours of conversation on parenting, so don’t get sucked in to only talking about the kids)? Do you both dislike these kinds of functions? Part of “networking” is finding the connection sites.

Ask Questions. Yes, I know I’ve already said that. I’m putting this back in as a reminder to go back to questions anytime you’re stuck. Also, if you notice that you’re doing all the talking, go back to asking questions. Others will let you know when you’re talking too much – they look away, or they find excuses to leave the conversation. It is common for us to ramble on when we don’t know how to continue the discussion – talking about yourself is not the answer.

There you have it – a few tips for becoming a little more comfortable in social situations. Before you know it, you’ll be throwing parties of your own to continue practicing!