



Tips for Talking with People You Don't Know (Yet)

Try these when you're having a conversation with someone you don't know well. Even if it doesn't lead to a long relationship, you'll learn something new about people and see the world from a new perspective.

1. **Think ahead.** Prepare some questions in advance that you might ask. These could include their job, interests, hobbies, family, or places they have lived or visited. Stay away from controversial topics when you're just getting started.
2. **Introduce yourself.** Smile, and maintain good eye contact. Focus more on the conversation than worrying about how you're being perceived.
3. **Start small.** Don't get too personal too quickly. Start with "small talk," or a general, non-controversial topic. It could be about the place where you're meeting, the weather, a current topic, or people you both know.
4. **Show interest.** If you're curious about other people, you'll have better conversations. Really listen to what they say about themselves. Ask follow-up questions, such as: "Say more about that," or, "I'm not familiar with that; can you tell me more about it?"
5. **Let go of preconceptions.** Almost everyone is really interested in or good at something—or has experiences different from your own. So if the first topic doesn't lead to a rich conversation, something else might.
6. **Invite more information.** A person may have an interest, hobby, skill, or job that you've never thought about. Ask them to tell you more about it—and what they enjoy about it. Or ask, "Can you tell me more about that?"
7. **Be open about yourself.** Give extra information that may make another connection. Reveal unique things about yourself. Pause when you're talking and ask other questions so you keep a two-way conversation going.
8. **Bring up ideas, but don't shoot them down.** The goal isn't to impress, but to stimulate more conversation. If you criticize or judge ideas early in a conversation, others may shut down because they don't feel safe in revealing what they think.
9. **Practice.** It takes a while to get comfortable talking to new people. At first it will be awkward. But, with practice, you can learn what works for you. You'll get more confident, and you'll learn to enjoy the ways new people expand your world.
10. **Close the conversation warmly.** When the conversation is winding down, say that you have enjoyed getting to know the other person. Thank them for taking the time, and, if appropriate, say that you'll look forward to the next time you can talk.

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