

How to Find Friends and Fight Loneliness After 60 (In 5 Steps!)

By Margaret Manning • 5 years ago • Health and Fitness

Despite everything we know about the importance of maintaining social connections as we get older, finding friends after 60 can be a challenge. As we age, the easy social connections that we enjoyed as schoolmates, parents and colleagues change. As a result, many women find themselves facing shrinking social circles and needing to make new friends. In other words, we find a void in our lives and no easy way to fill it.

In our search for companionship, technology is a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, services like Skype and Facebook allow us to stay connected with friends and family throughout the world. On the other hand, with everyone focused on clicking, it feels like “connecting” has taken on a new, softer meaning. Like many women, I often feel like I have 100's of “friends” and no-one to share my deepest dreams and fears with on a daily basis. Do you sometimes feel the same?

Despite all of the challenges, it is still clear that making friends and maintaining worthwhile relationships is essential after 60. Having good friends is not just a “nice to have” – it is essential for our health and emotional well-being, as I discussed in this interview with Suzanne Braun Levine.

The good news is that having a rich social life after 60 is absolutely possible – but, only if we take matters into our own hands! There are millions of wonderful people in the world who want more friends, people just like you. But, in order to find them, you need to face your fears, explore your passions, use your network and, most importantly, take a chance on reaching out to others.

Here are a few ideas for making new friends in your sixties.

1. Don't Hide from Your Feelings

Do you ever feel lonely? I do. That might seem strange to hear, coming from someone who started a community of 50,000 women over 60. But, the truth is that we all feel lonely from time to time. I know women in marriages and with big families that feel like they have no-one to talk to. Feeling lonely from time to time is natural. What we do about our feelings of loneliness is a choice!

The first step to dealing with loneliness is to separate yourself from the feeling so that you can give yourself permission to make positive changes in your life. Let me be clear. If you are feeling

lonely, you are not alone. As George Monbiot wrote in this article in the Guardian, “This is the Age of Loneliness.” You are a good person and you deserve true friendship, love and attention.

The fact that you are feeling lonely is not your fault. Nor is it something to be ashamed of. Once you admit this, you are more than half way to building the social life that you deserve. Loneliness is your mind’s way of telling you to get out there and engage with the world. The longer you stay in your own cocoon, the greater the chances that you will slip into an even darker mental state, like depression. So, act now!

Once you prepare yourself mentally for the road ahead, it’s time to define what “friendship” means to you. After all, as the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.”

2. Define What a “Friend” is to You

What do you value most in your friends? Do you look for people who enjoy the same activities as you? Do you like spending time with people who share similar beliefs to you? Or, do you prefer acquaintances that challenge your beliefs and make you think? Perhaps you enjoy the company of people who share similar political or religious beliefs. No matter what your preferences, it pays to be conscious in your choice of friends. This is true for a few reasons.

First, and most obviously, when you know what kinds of friends you are looking for, you can choose to engage in activities that will give you an opportunity to meet new people of your choosing. For example, are there political, religious, sports, social or other groups that you could reengage with?

Second, taking the time to think about what friendship means to you will make it more likely that you will see opportunities to start conversations in more natural settings – at the supermarket, in the post office, or in the park.

So, give some thought to what you’re looking for in a friend. Write your thoughts in a diary, if you have time. Friendship takes time, effort and advance planning. Think about the type of person that you’d like to meet and you just might increase your chances of meeting them!

3. Start with Your Existing Social Network – But, Don’t Limit Yourself to it

One of the easiest ways to find friendship after 60 is to reconnect with your old friends from high school, university or work. But, there’s a twist. Sometimes the people that you find you have the

most in common with may not be the people that you knew when you were younger. So, don't be afraid to reach out to people that you already know – but, also don't be afraid to use reunions and other events to meet other people with a similar background to you.

You might be surprised that you have developed common interests with your old friends in the years after school. Or, you might find that an old friendship that lapsed due to distance can be picked up where it left off. Don't automatically give up on old friends just because they moved away. For all you know, they might be in the same situation as you. They might be nervous to reach out to you, thinking that you are "too busy" to take their call. So, send a short email or use Skype to stay in touch. Even if you have to maintain your friendship from a distance, it's better than losing contact altogether.

Keep in mind that the first few connections will always be the hardest. The more people you are able to connect with, the easier it will be to find other long-lost friends.

Even if you feel a bit awkward at first, don't let your feelings hold you back. Yes, people are busy and there is a chance that you won't get a response. But, more than likely, your old friends will get back to you, even if it's just to catch up on news. People almost always like to stay connected – and you never know where a new contact will take you.

4. Embrace Your Passions Instead of Chasing New Relationships

One of the fantastic things about being 60 is that we finally know what we want. We understand our values and know what we want to accomplish in our lives. If you are like many women over 60, including myself, you may have a feeling that, with less time in front of you than behind, it's time to focus on adding people to your life that share your passions and dreams. This is one of the reasons that your passions, interests and skills can be such a great source of friends.

What are you passionate about? Do you have a favorite hobby like gardening, chess, knitting, tennis, golf, writing, cooking or reading? Do you have any special skills that other people might be interested in learning?

While you are exploring, don't feel limited to meeting people your own age. Be open to connecting with people of all ages! Some of the strongest friendships that I have are with people decades younger than me.

When you attend an event, club, or activity, don't be afraid to connect with strangers. One of the ironies of social events is that everyone tends to think that they are the only one that is nervous to talk to others. Talking to new people can be scary, but, don't be afraid to take a chance on

strangers. As long as you are in a public place, the worst that can happen is someone might not be what you are looking for in a friend.

5. Don't Rule Out Friendships with People of the Opposite Sex

Based on my conversations with the other women in the Sixty and Me community, the answer to this question is a resounding “yes!” However, it is also important to keep in mind that the dynamics between men and women change as we get a bit older.

There are many fantastic men out there who would love to be friends with you. But, unlike when we were teenagers, you may need to take the initiative. If you know a man who shares similar interests to you, don’t be afraid to ask him out for a coffee. What’s the worst that he can say? “No.” If he does, who cares? Just smile and move on to the next friend.

There is also nothing wrong with using online dating sites to find new friends. Many single men and women over 60 are starting over and developing casual, relaxed relationships, without the pressure. And, who knows. Maybe one of your new friendships will lead to something more romantic. Even if your friendship is totally platonic, it can still be a source of fun, fulfillment and companionship. If you are interested in finding a romantic partner, you may enjoy my interview with dating coach, Lisa Copeland.

Finding new friends after 60 can definitely be a challenge. But, if you face your fears, define what you are looking for in a friendship, make the most of your own network and reach out to people who share your interests, there is no need to be lonely. You deserve to have friendship in your life and I hope that you find people that make you truly happy!