

# Looking for Old Friends: How to Find Your Long-Lost Buddies or Gal Pals

Want to locate important people from your past that you've lost touch with? You definitely can. Looking for old friends may seem like a challenge, but finding them is probably easier than you think. From old classmates to former coworkers to cherished confidantes, it's possible to find people online—often for free. By using modern search methods, you can turn a lost friendship into a renewed connection that adds extra joy and meaning to your life.

That's why it's often worth the effort to try to locate old friends. Besides, the resources that are available today make it very likely that your search will be successful. You just need to learn how to find a lost friend with the tool that is most widely used for that purpose—the Internet.

At the most basic level, you find an old friend on the Internet by using search engines like Google, social networking platforms like Facebook, personal information aggregators like TruthFinder, alumni websites, and other online resources. If the Internet doesn't turn anything up, you can find a long-lost friend by hiring a private investigator (or using traditional investigative methods yourself).

Keep in mind that it's perfectly normal for people to lose touch with each other as the years go by. In fact, the number of friends in a person's life tends to peak at about the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> After that, friendships often drop off as people move away, get married, have children, and focus on their careers. So a lot of adults maintain fewer friendships than they did when they were younger because they simply have less time and energy to nurture them. But as an older adult, you may have more time to restore important friendships and even cultivate new ones, especially if you're retired.

When you find long-lost friends, the good feeling is often hard to describe. And if you're able to catch up and renew those friendships, it feels even better. Of course, not everyone wants to be found. An old friend may not be interested in reconnecting. But you'll never know unless you try.

In this article, you'll discover plenty of practical tips about how to track someone down by name or by other types of information. You'll also learn how to make completely new friends. Here's the best process to follow:

## 1. Get Organized

Before you begin your search for old friends, it's a good idea to plan how you will organize and keep track of the information you gather. Some people are super easy to find. But the more challenging it becomes to find old friends, the more bits and pieces of information you'll have to sift through. Simply put, you find an old friend by being

methodical and disciplined in your organizational habits.

The first thing you should decide is whether to organize everything electronically or on paper. Some people like to do both. Think about how tech-savvy you are. Do you regularly use software on your computer or apps on your mobile devices to take notes, save documents, and organize the information in your life? Or are you more comfortable with printing things out, writing stuff down, and putting everything in physical folders or notebooks?

Whichever method you choose, start thinking ahead about the types of information you may find. That way, you can create separate categories for them and you'll have an easier time finding specific details as your search goes on. Having separate categories will also make it easier to quickly organize information as you go, identify conflicting info, compare sources, and move forward in your search without repeating something you've already done.

So, for example, if you want to organize everything in physical form, consider having separate folders and/or notebooks for information gathered from each type of resource outlined in the rest of this article. You can also divide things up by information related to your old friend's locations, employers, potential contact information, and known (and possible) relatives and associates. If you choose to organize information digitally, consider using a popular app like [Evernote](#).

## **2. Collect Everything You Have or Know About Your Old Friend**

This step is closely linked to the previous one. Essentially, you need to gather and organize all of the information you already have. You simply can't figure out how to find a long-lost friend unless you make notes about what you remember or know to be true.

After all, in order to find someone online (or even through more traditional methods), you always have to start with at least one solid piece of information. It's like solving a puzzle:

The more pieces you have in place already, the easier it is to figure out the blank areas.

Try to remember and collect as many personal details as you can about your old buddy or

gal pal. And if you have current contact information for other people who knew your friend, get in touch with them and ask what they know or remember. For example, it's good to have information such as your long-lost friend's:

- Full name (or as close to this as possible)
  - Nicknames
  - Birth date or approximate age
  - Previous locations
  - Past addresses and/or phone numbers
  - Old schools
  - Previous employers
  - Potential marital status
  - Possible friends, family members, and associates
  - Hobbies and other personal interests
  - Professional ambitions
3. Photos can also be useful since they may spark your memory or help other people remember. Of course, it's unlikely you'll have all of that information. But whatever you do happen to know is what you can start building your search around.

## **4. Use Online Search Engines to Gather More Leads and Information**

Knowing how to find someone for free on the Internet is a great skill to have. It's a particularly useful skill for finding old friends. And it all starts with search engines. You probably already know about [Google](#), the world's most popular search engine. But did you know that you can sometimes get different results by using less-popular search engines such as [Bing](#) and [DuckDuckGo](#)?

Start with Google. Then, if you don't find your old friend or you feel you've done as much searching as you can on Google, try doing the same searches on at least two other search engines. That way, you'll maximize your chances of finding information that leads to your old friend.

Begin by searching for the name of your long-lost friend. For example, let's say you knew your friend as Isabella Smith. Simply type that name into the search bar and hit return. If your friend has a very common name, you'll get a lot of results for people who aren't the person you're looking for. But if your friend has an unusual name, you may get lucky and

see relevant results right away.

In any case, browse through at least the first five pages of results, carefully reading all the text to see if anything seems to apply to your old friend. If any of the results look promising, right-click on those links and open the linked web pages into new browser windows or tabs. (Always work this way instead of just clicking on links and hitting the back button. That way, you can more easily return to where you were and not have to worry about pages reloading or trying to find your place again. Just be careful not to accidentally close an entire browser window of open tabs.)

To get better results, try many additional searches that include extra bits of information based on what you already know about your old friend. If you know his or her first and last name, do some searches with the full name in quotation marks followed by extra bits of info. Or if you also know his or her middle name, middle initial, or nickname, try including those as well. For instance, here are some example searches you would try if you knew that your friend Isabella used to live in Denver, wanted to pursue a career in art, attended the University of Colorado, has a middle name starting with D, and may go by a nickname like Izzy or Bella:

- "isabella smith"
  - "isabella smith" denver
  - "isabella smith" university of colorado
  - "isabella smith" artist
  - "isabella d smith" denver colorado
  - "izzy smith" artist denver
  - "bella smith" artist colorado
5. Try several different combinations. If you think your old friend might have married someone, include terms like "wedding" or "married" in your searches in case any marriage announcements have been archived online that may provide you with a past or current married name.

Of course, you may not actually remember your long-lost friend's original last name. In that case, it's useful to know how to find someone online with just a first name. When using a search engine, the best method is usually to type in all the information you know. So, for example, your searches might look like this:

- isabella denver colorado artist
- izzy denver colorado artist
- bella denver colorado artist

6. In this example, it would also be worth doing some searches that include the word "designer." (People who are creative don't always pursue careers in the fine arts. Often, they pursue careers in more commercial fields that still utilize their talents. So it's smart to think more broadly and do some searches based on educated guesses about what your friend may have become.)

Also, don't forget to look at the image results for each search in Google. You may get lucky and spot a picture of your old friend that links to a website with information you didn't have before. You can also use a photo you already have of your friend and perform a reverse image search on Google or TinEye. That way, you can find any places on the Web that include that particular image or maybe even other images that are very similar to it.

As you collect useful information, be sure to organize it by putting it under the appropriate category and making note of exactly where it came from. Copy the link to the exact Web page if you can. In some cases, the information included in a Google search result may be difficult to find on the actual source website. In that situation, just make note of the specific information and the website it should be on so that you can take a more thorough look at it later.

When you've gathered what you believe to be solid clues, start incorporating that information into additional searches. For example, maybe you find clues that your friend Isabella moved to Seattle and married a guy with the last name Brown. Do several new searches like the following examples (and be sure to include the maiden name in some of them):

- "isabella brown" seattle
  - "izzy brown" seattle
  - "bella brown" seattle
  - "isabella brown" smith seattle
  - "isabella brown" smith washington
  - "izzy brown" smith seattle
  - "bella brown" smith seattle
7. As you acquire more clues, keep repeating the process. Some of the information you find may not be accurate, or it may apply to a different person than the one you're looking for. So you will probably follow some clues that lead to dead ends. That's OK; it's all part of the process. Any clues that you can eliminate will ultimately help you hone in on the ones that are accurate and useful.

And don't overlook this powerful tip: Do the same kinds of searches for anyone who continues to come up as a possible relative or associate of your old friend. Note their locations and the people associated with them. It's often the indirect path that finally leads to the person you want to find.

## **8. Search Facebook and Other Social Networking Websites**

Did you know that 68 percent of American adults use Facebook? It's true. Even a lot of

older adults use the world's most popular social networking platform. In fact, 65 percent of U.S. residents between the ages of 50 and 64—and about 41 percent of seniors over age 65—are on Facebook.<sup>2</sup> So it's definitely possible to find people on Facebook if you have an account on the platform (or know someone who does). There's no guarantee that you'll find your old friend this way, but the odds are pretty good that you'll at least glean some new information.

You search for someone on Facebook by logging into your account and using the search bar at the top of the page. To begin with, you can simply type in your old friend's name and hit enter to see who comes up. Then, right under the search bar, click on "People." That way, you can browse the entire list of people who have your friend's name (or a similar name). Unless the name is fairly uncommon, you'll likely get many results.

If you recognize your friend in any of the photos, then—congratulations—you've probably found him or her. If not, click on each of the individual results to check out the personal profiles and see whether anyone seems to fit your friend's description. While doing that, make sure you click the "About" tab underneath the profile photo, since that's where you'll usually find the best identifying information (as long as the person's profile isn't private). Failing that, try some additional searches. For example, your searches might look like the following. (Remember to include the person's maiden name in some of them, if applicable):

- isabella brown
  - izzy brown
  - bella brown
  - isabella smith brown
  - isabella brown smith
  - people named isabella brown who live in seattle washington
9. You can further refine your searches by knowing how to find old school friends on Facebook or looking people up based on their location. For instance, you find old classmates on Facebook by following the process above, then clicking on "Choose a School" under "Education" from the column on the left side of the page that's titled "Filter Results." Simply type in your old school name and select it in the list that appears to see if anyone with your friend's name shows up. Similarly, you search for someone on Facebook by location by clicking on "Choose a City" under "City" in the "Filter Results" column.
- Often, it's difficult to know whether any of the people who show up in Facebook's results

actually match the person you're seeking. After all, many people don't use photos of themselves in their profiles, and they may purposefully keep their locations, alma maters, employers, friend lists, and other personal information private (i.e., only viewable by their Facebook friends). In that situation, you search for a friend on Facebook by using what you know about his or her family members or known associates.

If you've already done a lot of research through search engines, then it's highly likely you've obtained the names of people who may have close ties to your old friend. That means you can perform Facebook searches on each of those people. And if you're lucky, some of them will have public friend lists that you can browse. You may discover that at least one of them is friends on Facebook with someone who has your old friend's name. If so, you've probably found the person you've been hoping to get in touch with.

Thanks to the platform's widespread popularity, finding old friends on Facebook is becoming more and more common for those who know how to use it. But a lot of people still aren't on Facebook. Some people simply prefer to keep a low profile online or enjoy using other social media platforms instead. So it may be worth joining a few additional social networking sites.

Although they are much less popular—especially among older adults—it's a good idea to check out LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. Each of those sites offers its own search tool that can enable you to find users with your old friend's name.

## **10. Take Advantage of Online Directories and Information Aggregators**

These types of websites collect public information from all around the Web, and you'll start running across them as soon as you use a search engine to find your friend. In fact, incredibly useful information from them is often included directly in Google's search results. But if you click through to one of these websites, be aware of their selling tactics. Many of them will encourage you to take some kind of action that you probably don't need to do at this stage, such as sign up, become a member, pay for a subscription, or order a comprehensive report. Some of them even make non-member searches on their sites painfully slow so that you'll give in and make a purchase.

At some point, it may be worth paying one of these sites for extra information. However, you can often use them to find people online (by name) for free. Regardless of whether you search for someone directly on one of these websites or click through to them from Google results, you'll generally be presented with a long list of people who have the same name (or a very similar name) as the person you're looking for. The lists also usually

include the approximate ages of each person, past and potentially current locations, possible relatives, and aliases.

That's a wealth of information—all usually available for free. So if you know how old your friend would be, you can greatly narrow down these lists, especially since you will also know at least one place that he or she has lived before. And if you know the names of any of his or her relatives, it's even easier to pinpoint the person you're seeking.

Just keep in mind that, with this type of online people search, the information may not always be accurate or up to date. So it's a good idea to do a lot of cross-referencing on different websites to see what information consistently shows up. Plus, different sites often provide different bits of information that you can piece together into a more complete profile without having to pay for anything.

Of course, paying for a detailed report on someone may provide you with information that would be difficult to get through other methods, such as current contact info. And since these types of websites aggregate personal information from a wide variety of public sources, they offer a fast and convenient way to get that info. Many sites even make it possible to find profiles by email address or phone number, which can be useful if you can't remember a person's full name and only have an old piece of contact information to go on.

Again, not all online information aggregators offer exactly the same information, but many of them can provide you with personal details like:

- Names of possible relatives
- Possible aliases
- Phone numbers
- Home addresses
- Email addresses
- Social networking accounts
- Online posts such as reviews, comments, and blog entries
- Court records
- Criminal records
- Real estate listings
- Voter registration records
- Marriage records



11. If you don't have much success using one website, you can always try another...and another. After all, there are many online directories and information aggregators to choose from. Just be mindful of the fact that some of these websites may not follow customer-friendly billing practices. If you sign up for a trial subscription, be sure to cancel your account before the trial period expires. Here are some examples of websites in this category:

- Whitepages
- US Search
- PeopleFinders
- Intelius
- BeenVerified
- TruthFinder
- PrivateEye
- Spokeo
- ZabaSearch
- Radaris
- PeekYou
- Veromi
- CheckThem
- Instant Checkmate
- Verispy

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### **13. Join Alumni Associations and Explore Affinity Websites**

A lot of people are able to find former classmates by becoming members of alumni websites and associations. This method is particularly useful if you want to reconnect with old school friends but can't quite remember their names. That's because you may be able to browse old class photos and match names to faces. It's usually best to start by finding your former school's alumni website.

For example, with this method, you find a high school friend by first searching on Google with the name of your high school in quotes followed by the word "alumni" and the school's location (e.g., "rangeview high school" alumni aurora colorado). If your alma mater has its own official alumni association, it should appear within the first page or two of search results. Many schools also maintain Facebook pages for alumni groups.

Once you find the alumni association for your former high school, college, or university, you simply need to register for free as a new member in order to gain access to class directories, photos, reunion announcements, and information about other members. If

you're lucky, the former classmates you want to find will also be members, enabling you to get in touch with them through email or the alumni association's messaging system. So your school's alumni association may offer a free website to find someone you used to go to class with. But you may also run into commercial websites that say they help connect former classmates with each other. Some websites even help former military members reconnect.

However, on most commercial websites, you'll need to pay for a membership in order to see photos, look at profiles, or message people. And sites of this type tend to have poor reputations when it comes to customer billing and email marketing. Some of them even operate as scams, pretending to be official alumni associations. (Always look for disclaimers in tiny print.)

So you may only want to pay for a membership on a commercial site as a very last resort if other search methods don't prove fruitful. Generally speaking, these kinds of sites are best avoided. But here are two examples of affinity websites that have decent reputations:

- [Alumni.NET](#)
- Military.com's Buddy Finder

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## **15. Use Your Library Card to Access ReferenceUSA**

Do you have a good public library in your area? If so, make a call to find out if it offers people the ability to use ReferenceUSA, which provides some of the most current information about people you can find. If your library subscribes to this service, you can access it with your library card. In fact, many libraries across the U.S. will let you access ReferenceUSA on their own websites, or you may be able to visit your library in person and use one of its computers to access the service.

## **16. Search Government Records**

These days, you can often access official court, marriage, voter registration, and other

public records online for free. That means, if you're willing to do a little digging yourself, you may not have to pay any information aggregators like those listed in step 5 above. To find official state or county websites with the information you want, simply do a search in Google that includes the type of records you're seeking followed by the state and/or county name. Here are some example searches:

- "court records" king county washington
  - "marriage records" jefferson county colorado
17. Not all counties and states offer online access to records, so you may have to make the effort to request public records in person. You'll just need to visit the right offices for the specific types of records you're after. For example, if you want to access marriage records in person, you'll probably have to visit the county clerk's office or vital records department for the region where you think your old friend was married.

## **18. Reach Out to People Who May Have Useful Information**

Have you kept in touch with anybody else who knew your old friend? You may be surprised by what other people remember. You may even get lucky and discover that someone else has actually remained in contact with the very person you've been hoping to find. Plus, while conducting your search, you'll likely gather a good list of your long-lost friend's potential relatives, friends, coworkers, and other associates. If you find their contact information, why not reach out to some of them and see if they can help you?

When approaching someone with your request, you can say something like, "I'm looking for my friend who I haven't seen for years and years. I was wondering what you might know or remember about them. Any information will help and be greatly appreciated." If the person is local, offer to buy lunch or share a chat over coffee. Explain how you knew your old friend and what your intentions are in trying to get in touch with him or her.

## **19. Make Yourself Easy to Find**

Have you ever searched for yourself on Google to see what comes up? If you have, you're

not alone. Many people are curious to know what others may be saying about them online. You can take advantage of that curiosity by starting a blog or website of your own and writing a little about the old friends you want to find. It's a creative, albeit indirect approach to finding people online that can sometimes pay off.

Consider getting a personal domain name for your blog or website that includes your first and last names (e.g., [www.jane-doe.com](http://www.jane-doe.com)). Then, when posting about your old friends, include their full names, information about how you know them, the reasons why you want to reconnect, and a link to a contact form for getting in touch with you through email. You can mention things like schools you attended together, mutual friends, and places you've both lived. But avoid mentioning very personal information such as specific addresses, birthdays, or other things that should remain private. And definitely don't write anything that could be remotely embarrassing to your old friends or those who know them.

## **20. Consider the Possibility That Your Old Friend Has Passed Away**

If you've tried all of the methods above and still can't find old friends—online or off—it might be because they're deceased. Sometimes, people pass away without leaving much of a public trace behind them. And friends and relatives of deceased individuals are sometimes reluctant to talk about their loved ones with those they don't know well. So you may need to do a little more digging to find out whether an old friend has died.

In addition to visiting the department of vital records in the state where you think your friend might have passed away, you can search various websites that may have the information you need. For example, search for your friend's name on obituary, genealogical, archive, and related websites such as:

- [Legacy.com](http://Legacy.com)
- [Tributes.com](http://Tributes.com)
- [Find A Grave](http://Find A Grave)

- BillionGraves
- FamilySearch
- Ancestry
- NewspaperArchive
- Archives

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## **22. Hire a Private Investigator**

By now, you may be wondering, "How can I find an old friend without doing so much of this work myself?" Here's the answer: Hire someone to search for you—someone who specializes in exactly this sort of thing. In other words, hire a private investigator.

Depending on where you live, who you hire, and how difficult the search turns out to be, it may cost you as little as around \$200 or up to \$1,000 or more. But it may be money well spent if 1) you've done your own search already and didn't find your old friend or 2) you don't have the time or inclination to conduct your own detailed search using the methods outlined above.

Besides, licensed private investigators often have access to information databases that aren't publicly available. And their search techniques are probably more sophisticated than what you can do yourself. Before hiring a private investigator, always make sure that his or her professional license is valid (if a license is required in your state). And don't hand over any money until you have a signed contract that outlines the terms and cost of the investigation. Many private investigators advertise their services in local media, but you can also find them through a referral website like PInow.com.

## **23. Get in Touch With Your Old Friend (If Your Search Is Successful)**

When you finally discover where old friends live and know how to contact them, it's a beautiful feeling. But instead of rushing to get in touch right away, it can be helpful to pause and reflect on what your next goals should be. Congratulate yourself on a successful search. Celebrate the achievement. Then get serious about your intentions,

keeping in mind that your long-lost friend may not be in the same mental or emotional space as you.

Shift your thinking to look at things from the point of view of your old friend. Depending on why you two lost touch, he or she may not have expected to ever hear from you again. And a whole lot could have happened over the years to change his or her personality or outlook on various things. So it's wise to approach your new interactions with some caution and respect for any doubt, confusion, or difficult feelings that he or she may experience.

When you do actually contact your old friend for the first time in many years, remind him or her about how you know each other. Share some of your fondest memories and a little bit about what's happened in your own life since you two lost touch. But also be attuned to any signs of reluctance or discomfort. Try to let your friend lead the conversation, even if he or she wants to keep it short. Re-establishing old friendships can take time, and in some cases, it doesn't happen at all. Of course, things can and do also happen in the opposite way: Maybe it will be a wonderful reunion, as if you two never lost touch. Be prepared for each of those possibilities.

## **24. Keep Making New Friends (Here's How)**

When you're eager for more interpersonal connection, looking for old friends seems like a natural place to start. Indeed, reconnecting with long-lost friends can be a good way to add more joy to your life. But don't overlook the value of building entirely new friendships, something that is often easier to do than trying to find old friends and revive dormant relationships.

Besides, even if you restore old friendships, it's always wise to add new friends in order to maintain your social well-being. In fact, according to one study, friendships have more health- and happiness-related benefits than family relationships as people get older. And having friends becomes more important the older you get.<sup>3</sup> So why not try to create some completely new friendships? Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Adopt an opportunistic mindset**—Potential friends are probably all around you. In fact, many great people want more friends but are too shy or fearful to make the first move. So if you see an opportunity to get to know someone a little better, take it. Make the first move. Treat it like an adventure, understanding that things may not go the way you imagined. Stay open when you're in social situations or doing activities you enjoy. And if you're on Facebook, join some groups that have been created for people with your interests. You may be able to meet group members who live in your area.
  - **Be willing to take risks**—Making friends as an older adult often requires the courage to be vulnerable. Sure, rejection stings. But if you accept that it's sometimes just part of the process, you can start putting aside your fears and begin asking people if they'd like to have a drink with you, go for a walk, or share some other kind of activity. Do you ever have stories running in your head about other people not liking you or already having enough friends? Don't listen to them; most of the time, those stories are false.
  - **Do some shared activities**—Just sitting down for a chat might be a little too intimidating at first. So when you're initially getting to know somebody, it's often easier to do something else that you can both focus on, such as playing games or participating in other fun activities together. That way, you'll both feel less pressure to keep your conversation moving forward. You'll also have something to talk about, and you'll get to see a bit of each other's personalities.
  - **Have deep conversations**—Once you've broken the ice and feel a little more comfortable with someone, it's good to start trying to bond at a deeper level. Think about what you can reveal about yourself that will make the other person comfortable with letting down his or her own guard. Do you have any common passions or dislikes? What would you really like to know about your potential new friend? Share your personal stories as a way to encourage the other person to open up.
  - **Maintain your connection**—Establishing a new friendship happens bit by bit over time. So try to keep communicating, even if it's only over the phone or online. Continue to make suggestions for new get-togethers every so often. And after you've spent time together, make sure you let the other person know that you enjoyed his or her company.
25. Ultimately, whether you find old friends or make new ones, the rewards are often proportional to the amount of attention you dedicate to those relationships. Always remember that you deserve the joy and sense of meaning and connection that friendships offer. Never hesitate to elevate your social well-being by seeking out friends, wherever they may be.