

#PERSPECTIVE

# Is it harder to make friends as an adult?

If you have already navigated your 30s, you have likely gained a wealth of experiences. You may have received promotions at the job you started in your mid-twenties, built close friendships, added a few extra inches around your waist, and perhaps even found a spouse and an extended family. Despite these developments, you might find that making new friends has become increasingly difficult.

"Back in the days, I was carefree. The only irk I can remember was probably the exams every six months, but that was it, no other burden or stress. Now I have a family to take care of, others' expectations to fulfil, and on top of that, knee pain to cure. I just can't take out the time to spend with my old friends, let alone make new ones," sighed Nowshad Kamal, a man in his mid-40s.

His statement reflects a hard truth. As our lives evolved, they embraced more and more chaos with each passing moment. When we were children, life was ridiculously simple in the best possible way. Perhaps, the biggest crisis of the day was losing a pencil or being "out" in a sport.

Even though most of us had a curfew to return home before Maghrib, our afternoons seemed to stretch on endlessly. As we said our goodbyes in the evening, we always knew we would meet the next day again and continue right where we left off.

"Friendships have gotten really complicated, just like life," sighs Ahmed Bashir, an assistant lecturer at a university. "I mean, sleepovers were basically a weekend ritual for me but now, I can't even remember when I had a proper get-together with my friends. It is not that I don't have work buddies, but the interactions are mostly very formal," he adds with a sigh.

The weekend for kids is typically airy, and why would they not be? They have no career anxiety or existential spirals about achieving life goals. In contrast, as adults, we often find that the number of formal relationships tends to outnumber genuine friendships, much like how the grey hair count escalates over shiny black ones.

"I'm a working mom, and when I drop off or pick up my son from school, I often run into groups of other moms," Farhana Yeasmine said. "I tried to befriend them,

but they don't hesitate to judge each other's parenting. It's like they are in a competition over how many extra classes their kids are in. I eventually decided to leave those groups for good. Now, I just give them a polite nod, nothing more."

Adulthood certainly enhances our judgment. However, while some of us focus on minding our own business, we cannot avoid the snide remarks from others. These comments come from all directions, a reality that was unimaginable during our childhood. Back then, concepts like social status, comparison, promotion, and financial stability were not part of our vocabulary.

Talking about financial stability, this is one of the most despairing topics for a lot of adults, and I guess, life was richer when we did not have or know the value of deep pockets. Not to mention



friendships in adulthood are highly affected by it.

"After completing my BBA from the Dhaka University, I joined a renowned company, and I was doing so well that I loved reopening my bank transfer messages," Mahmud states. "However, I wanted to start something of my own, so I resigned for a new beginning. It's taking time, and while I'm okay with that, I can't shake the feeling that my friends and ex-co-workers are laughing at me. Or maybe I'm just overthinking, I don't know."

As we grow older, we become more

aware of our values, boundaries, and emotional needs, and we are less willing to tolerate relationships that drain us. Unlike childhood or college friendships that often form out of proximity, adult friendships require conscious effort and mutual respect. However, it can also mean outgrowing certain friendships that no longer align with personal growth.

"I'm a divorcee. Though that is not even a tiny bit of my identity, I always feel people are judging me by this," says Lubna Alam, a school teacher. "Most women after a certain age, begin their conversations with 'Are you married?' 'What does your husband do?' or 'How many kids do you have?' If the answers are negative, they are not befriended, or I haven't met people who think differently, but who knows?"

Our society has different standards for success, and we tend to adopt these as we enter adulthood. Unfortunately, these standards can reshape our mindset, leading us to evaluate people based on them. Consequently, meeting new people and forming genuine connections can become more challenging than dealing with a receding hairline in one's 40s.

As careers become more demanding, with long hours, tight deadlines, and constant connectivity, friendships can be pushed to the wayside. When

work consistently takes priority, plans are postponed, messages are left unanswered, and meeting friends becomes a luxury, which can weaken even the strongest bonds over time.

However, Shaira Haseen, an interior designer, puts it differently, "Just drop the myth that you will meet or talk to your friends daily or weekly. You are not in school anymore. Our friendships evolve as we grow up, and sometimes, they last a lifetime, even if you are not in contact regularly." Well, maybe she is right, the right kind of friendships are indeed low maintenance and don't make you feel apologetic for every missed meet-up.

Making friends in adulthood is not always as difficult as it might seem. Someone once said, "Hiking in your 40s is a great way to meet new people. Today, I met two paramedics, three nurses, and almost met the Almighty." If you smiled, congratulations, you are old, because that was a dad joke.

But in all seriousness, forming new friendships in adulthood is not impossible, even if it cannot replicate the effortless bonds we had in childhood. Ultimately, one truth remains: friendships do not just magically happen in adulthood; they require time and effort from both sides to develop.

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