Where Did Everyone Go?

A Practical Guide to Building an Adult Social Life, With the Research Behind It

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CHAPTER 1

Why Adult Friendship Feels Harder Than It Used To

The American Time Use Survey is a federal study. A large national sample of people describe how they spent one day, hour by hour. The 2025 results came out in June 2026 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. On an average day in 2025, 30 percent of people took part in socializing and communicating. In 2015 the figure was 38 percent. Over the same ten years, the average time in that category fell from 41 minutes a day to 35 minutes.

The survey does not show how many of those days held a long evening with friends and how many held almost no contact. An average of 35 minutes can hide a pattern in which one long evening with friends is followed by six days with almost no contact. The figure is a daily average across all people, so it is pulled down by the many days on which nobody is seen at all.

Friendship counts show the same pattern from another side. In a Pew Research Center survey published in October 2023, 8 percent of U.S. adults said they had no close friends. Forty percent of men and 36 percent of women said they had five or more. These are self-reported numbers, and each person decides what counts as close. Older surveys from other groups used different wording and reported sharper drops for men. Figures from different surveys should never be joined into one trend line. The safe reading is that a real share of adults have few close friends, and that most people fall somewhere in the middle.

Another piece of context is where adults used to meet. Bars, happy hours and drink-centered nights out have long served as default social settings. Gallup's July 2026 poll found that 54 percent of U.S. adults say they drink alcohol, which ties the lowest reading in its recent

series. The share was 62 percent in 2023, 58 percent in 2024 and 54 percent in 2025. The poll asks whether people drink. It does not ask where they spend their evenings, so it cannot prove that fewer people go out. It does suggest that a setting many adults once relied on is used by a smaller share of them. Anyone building a social life may do well to look at options that do not revolve around a bar.

None of these numbers explains why one person feels isolated. None of them proves that phones, work or housing is to blame. They point to one plain idea. School, shared dorm halls and workplaces where everyone stayed for years once produced friendship automatically. Those structures are less present in adult life, and the free time left over is shorter on average than it was ten years ago.

Seen this way, the problem is mostly practical. A person who stops meeting new people has not failed at friendship. That person has lost the built-in repetition that used to do the work. Repetition can be rebuilt on purpose, and the next chapter explains how much of it is needed.