



Friend request: Making new friends abroad

Friends play a huge role in our happiness. They support us in bad times, celebrate with us in good times, share experiences, and help us make better lifestyle choices. We are also happier and more productive on the job if we have friends at work. Tom Rath, Director of the Gallop Organization, conducted an extensive study of friendship for his book, *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford to Live Without*. He found that people who have no real friends at work have only a one in 12 chance of feeling engaged in their job. Conversely, those with a good friend at work are seven times more likely to feel engaged.

Without old friends and familiar activities close by, we can feel isolated and lonely when we move to a new city or country. In the absence of emotional support and honest advice, our ability to deal effectively with both professional and personal problems is hindered.

Meeting new friends in a new country can feel scary and overwhelming. Differences in language, customs, politics, ways of communicating, work styles, and societal roles can create barriers to making a new social circle. But there are ways to make it less stressful – and start enjoying everything that the new location has to offer.

Taking the leap

It takes a certain amount of courage – and work – to go out and meet new people in a new environment. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Join expat groups.** You'll not only meet people with similar backgrounds, you'll also learn more about the local culture and its customs, language issues, and how business is conducted.
- **Get involved with your child's school.** You'll get to know other parents through your children and school activities.

Let us help. Access your Expatriate Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) 24/7 by phone, web or mobile app.

Visit workhealthlife.com for worldwide access numbers or call your local operator and request to place a collect call to Canada at 905.886.3605.



- **Sign your children up for their favourite activities** – karate, dance, soccer – as soon as possible. They'll make friends and so will you.
- **If you are a member of a faith community, find a place of worship that meets your family's needs.** Participate in activities and volunteer your time.
- **Join a local team and play your favourite sport or learn a sport that is popular in your new location.** If you're musical, join a band or choir.
- **Volunteer.** Coach sports, teach a class or get involved with a local charity both in the expat and local communities.
- **Take a class.** Improve your language skills, learn to dance or explore new hobbies and pastimes.
- **Contact your university or college alumni association.** Most have branches around the world that hold events and get-togethers.
- **Join professional associations.** These provide opportunities to meet people with similar interests and experiences, as well as help expand your professional network.
- **Be a host.** Invite your new neighbours, acquaintances, fellow expats, and work colleagues to help celebrate both your own cultural and national holidays as well as those of your new location.
- **Accept invitations.** If you're invited to take part in a local festival or other traditional events, don't hesitate. It's a great way to learn more about your host culture and get to know people outside the expat community.

Finally, don't forget your old friends. It's not easy to maintain a relationship from a distance, but with the ongoing support of close friends your transition to a new location will be easier – as well as the transition back to your home country if and when you choose to return. Take advantage of social media, instant messaging, email, and Skype to stay connected.

If you're struggling to make friends, contact your Employee Assistance Program for support, for more resources, ideas and information.

Let us help. Access your Expatriate Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) 24/7 by phone, web or mobile app.

Visit workhealthlife.com for worldwide access numbers or call your local operator and request to place a collect call to Canada at 905.886.3605.

