



AuSM's highly trained, certified therapists have committed their careers to helping individuals with autism understand their diagnosis and address both the challenges and gifts that it can bring. The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team sends out a monthly email to answer questions submitted by our community. Register to receive this monthly column via email at www.ausm.org.

Dear Therapist:

I want to make more time for friends, but I am very busy. Do you have any suggestions?

Friendly But Busy

Dear Friendly:

First, I just want to acknowledge it truly is very difficult to find time to hang out with other people in this busy world. We often have so many other priorities that we forget to make our friends/loved ones a priority. I would start with setting reminders to contact friends in the way which makes the most sense to you. It is incredibly easy to forget about other people, especially if you don't see them every day. And even if you are not able to determine a good time and place to see friends, at least the reminder will prompt you to get in contact with them.

Depending on what you and your friends like, sending messages when you're not hanging out with them can be a great way to connect. These messages do not have to be complicated or lengthy, either; sending memes or Tik Toks (as an example) can be a way to show you care or you're thinking of them.

If you're thinking you may want to see your friends in person, you may want to consider how many "spoons" you have in a given week. For example, if you know you have a busy/rough week ahead of you and you know you may need to decompress over the weekend, you might want to schedule for a different weekend. The opposite might also be true; you may want to see friendly faces after a stressful stretch of time.



Something else to consider would be your sensory needs. Do you want to be in a place with a lot of noise? Are you okay with certain smells? Does it matter if there are a lot of people? Ideally, you would talk (or text, whichever is more accessible to you) with your friends to determine the right place and time. Spending time together and having fun should be some of the main goals. Where you go and what you do does not need to be extravagant; simply being in your friends' presence can be more than enough to maintain connections.

That being said, spending time with friends online is also acceptable. It can be a solution to seeing friends when you are low on spoons. Online games especially can be good if you do not feel like making small talk since the focus is on the game and its objectives. It can definitely be a bonus if you have your camera off and therefore have more freedom to stim or otherwise self-regulate.

If you want to see people without leaving your house, online platforms like Discord and Zoom can provide great opportunities to just talk or parallel play. Parallel play can look like doing your own activities while sharing a common space with other people doing separate activities. Again, the focus can be just sharing an experience and time with loved ones in this chaotic world. Good luck!

Sara Lahti, MA, LPCC
Autism Society of Minnesota
Counseling and Consulting

If you would like to submit a question for the AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team, please e-mail autismcounseling@ausm.org or contact us at 651.647.1083.