

10 Suggestions For the Unsocial

Last week I went to a Church Work Camp called Bridge Builders. It brought kids from various denominations together to perform service projects and to sing and dance to very loud rock music.

It was wonderful.

But as one of the adult leaders there, I had the opportunity to observe the kids as they interacted. Oh, how it reminded me of my teen years! Sometimes painfully. You see, I wasn't always a social kid - actually, I was pretty awkward socially.

So, when I saw some kids struggle to fit in, get along, or just plain disappear in the crowd, I felt for them. That's when I decided to write down a list of ten suggestions that I wish someone had offered me. Maybe they'll help some kid down the road....

Not everyone is comfortable in a social situation. For some it comes naturally, but for others - lots of us - it is not easy or comfortable or fun. It's hard sometimes to know the rules, especially if you avoid crowds to begin with - practice makes perfect, and all that. But everybody has to deal with social situations either for school, church, business or some other interest or necessity. How do you survive the social situation when it's just not you?

These guidelines are for social situations, that is, times when you're with a group of more than two people, especially if they are not your closest friends. Examples: youth group, camp, a party, a field trip, a business meeting or any type of group. It could be people you sort of know or don't know at all

Don't worry about those who seem confident, cool, the life of the party. That's them, not you. Your aim is to get through the social situation without feeling too uncomfortable and without making others feel awkward. And in so doing, maybe you can get something positive out of the experience,

1. When it comes to talking about yourself, less is more. Talk about your interests only after A) you have been asked or B) you have at least already asked about theirs.

The less is more principal applies to positive experiences of the moment. When you find you are enjoying your social interaction, say it simply and then stop. Don't get carried away with the moment. "I'm really enjoying myself" works well in expressing your feelings. "This is the best thing ever; I don't ever want this to stop" is probably too much.

2. Be sincerely interested in what the other(s) have to say & ask follow-up questions and/or make appropriate responses - like, "Wow, cool, That would scare/frighten/interest/anger/thrill/(whatever)... me". And so on.

3. Make sure your contributions are on topic. You may have something of interest you want to talk about, but if that's not what the group is doing, it won't fit in - and therefore, it won't be properly heard. If what you want to talk about is really important, look for a place in the conversation where there is at least some relation to what's already being talked about. There is time - if it's really important, you won't forget it. Waiting for the appropriate time to say something - that is, waiting until there is a break where a change in subject is okay - will mean that what you have to say will have a better chance of being appreciated by the people you're talking to.

4. In general, never, never, never interrupt. Wait for pauses in the conversation. Wait a long time if necessary. It's like driving. Sometimes you have to wait awhile to merge into traffic. When you do, it's smooth. When you don't, you crash.

5. Always be positive and encouraging. This is social setting, not class or debate. If someone shares an interest of theirs, what is important is that you are listening, not that you agree or disagree. Never ever put them down or say anything that could even be thought of as putting them or their dreams down.

6. It is fair to highlight something you have in common with the other. Example: if someone says they are from the same town you're from, you can mention that you come from there, too. Don't make a big deal out of it, and make sure you wait for an appropriate opening in the conversation, but it's nice to make connections.

7. Never, never, never touch another person or their property without their permission. If you are not absolutely sure it's okay, it's always safer and more appropriate not to.

8. Try new things. If it's not dangerous/illegal/immoral/mean try what folks are doing. Be a good sport about it. Or at least don't make a big deal about it - quietly decline.

9. Never be a show off. Leave that to others. In the long run, it'll work better for you.

10. If you are stuck talking politics - which isn't so fun in a social setting - don't lie, but do ask questions more than make statements. Never put the other person or their position/practices/beliefs down. Make sure you really understand their position and repeat it to them before ever getting to yours. The same rules apply when talking religion.

Being in a social situation is unavoidable, but being paralyzed by it is not. It is in your hands to do things in such a manner that you get through the social setting with little pain, but also to find some pleasure and possibly connections that will be positive and useful to you in the future.

You can still buy my book, "God, Life, and Everything." Cost is \$14 (includes tax). Just call 845-229-2820. You can also purchase it at Cranberry's at Tilly Hall (in Hyde Park). If you want the book shipped to you, add \$2.50 for shipping.

You can also still register for the Rail Trail Pilgrimage. Just call St. James' Church at 229-2820. Or e-mail me at revckramer@gmail.com