

Small talk serves an important purpose - it helps build the foundation for authentic conversations and deeper relationships down the road.

First dates are all about 'small talk', talking about topics that are not that personal. This may seem unimportant or meaningless, but it is not. This small talk serves an important purpose - it helps build the foundation for authentic conversations and deeper relationships down the road.

There is a process to building a relationship, you can't leap-frog and skip steps. You move from small to medium to big talk.

Ask questions

People like talking about themselves and their experiences, so ask questions.

Every question you ask has the potential to narrow or expand the dialogue.

Start with a small question, then follow up with a bigger question to build the conversation.

- Where are you from? --> How is that different from this city?
- What do you do?--> What brought you to that type of work?

Ask Open-ended 'Why' and 'How' Questions.

When you ask a "Why" question, you explore a person's underlying motivation.

Ask good questions that won't put them on the spot, but will allow them to reveal more or less about themselves, depending on their comfort level. Use questions that begin with phrases like:

- Tell me about...
- What was the best part of...
- How did you feel about...
- What brought you to...
- What's surprised you most...
- How similar/different is that to...
- Why...

Every conversation is an opportunity to learning something new.

People have difference experiences, perspectives, insights and ideas. Ask questions to learn from the other person. Be curious to learn something from the time you spend together.

Ask for advice or insight. People love sharing their experience and wisdom. "You traveled a lot, what might be a good place for a short trip?"

When you discover a topic that the other is passionate about, ask, listen, ask.

- "Tell me more."
- "What is it like?"
- "How did you get into that?"

Make it easier for the other person to expand the conversation.

Insert 'hooks' into your conversation, multi-faceted responses that gives the other something to ask about or build on to continue the conversation.

Don't give the short answer, thereby forcing the other person to scramble for more questions.

Try to make everyone you talk with feel a little better about themselves after having met and talked to you.

Ask for their insight or advice. And then thank them after.

Compliment them - their commitment, their sense of adventure, their curiosity.

"You seem so committed to that."

"That takes guts. Wow."

"It's amazing how far you got in that."

As applicable, tell them how you will incorporate their perspective or ideas into your life. "That was a great word choice, I'll try to include that in my conversations from hereon."

Avoid your favorite topic.

You'll end up talking too much and not listening enough.

Talk about your favorite topic.

If there is a topic that you are passionate and curious about, bring it up. Ask questions to get their perspective and insight. If it is something you are interested in and the other person has some insight and experience, the conversation can really flow.

If you sense that the other person doesn't know much about the topic, or doesn't want to talk about it, move on.

When in doubt about what to talk about, bring up ...

- the setting where you find yourself
- family (unless you know it is uncomfortable topic)
- what you are doing currently
- current events (read the news before you meet)
- recent travels
- book you are currently reading

Avoid hijacking the conversation.

'Hijacking the conversation' means bringing the conversation back to yourself. Don't do it.

"Oh that reminds me of a time..." Blah blah blah

"You just went to Israel, I did too. Let me tell you all about it....." Blah blah blah

Body language shows your level of interest.

Everyone's body language provides hints to others during the course of a conversation, even if they don't realize that they are doing it. Nonverbal communications are very difficult to fake.

- Moving closer or leaning in toward the other person usually shows that you are interested.

- Crossed arms make you appear cold, closed-off, or aggravated.
- Slouching, moving away can indicate a lack of interest.
- Nodding, smiling (genuine smiling) show interest.
- Make eye contact. Looking away can indicate discomfort with what you are saying or hearing. Of course, avoid eye rolling, etc.

Mirror the other person.

People feel more comfortable by those who match their behavior, tone of voice, talking speed, and so on. If they speak softly, bring your own voice down a notch; if they're enthusiastic, act similarly.

Don't mirror what they are saying.

Don't repeat their observations, or just agree with them. Build on what they said.

NOT "Beautiful day." "Yes, it is a beautiful day today." RATHER "Beautiful day." "On days like this, we used to go to the park for a picnic."

Now you have given the other person a hook to continue the conversation.

Put your phone away.

Nothing says "I'm not totally with you" like looking at your phone.

Small talk is not only for dating. It is an important skill for so much of life: work, parties, events, networking.

The only way to get better at small talk is to practice.

You have to practice it in situations where it really doesn't matter, so that you're ready when it does.