

## Starting a Conversation With an Attractive Stranger

You are standing with a couple of friends at a party talking. Across the room, you notice someone who looks kind of attractive, and you think that you'd like to meet that person. Maybe if he or she likes you, you'll be able to get a phone number, or perhaps have a date. You feel a bit excited but also nervous about approaching this good-looking person.

Feeling nervous is a common emotion in this kind of situation. We are often afraid that if we try to start a conversation, the other person will reject us. According to Jean Smith, a social and cultural anthropologist, fear of rejection is the most common reason why we decide not to start a conversation with an attractive person whom we'd like to meet.

However, according to Smith, we can overcome that obstacle if we think in a different way about our goal of being liked or of getting a phone number or having a date.

Smith says that the purpose of starting the conversation should not be to try to get people to like us or approve of us. Instead, it should be about making the other person feel special. With that as our goal, it takes a lot of pressure off us when we think about approaching them. We are just hoping to have a pleasant experience with them. Perhaps the conversation will be only five minutes, and that's fine.

With our goal of making the person feel good or special, Smith has some tips for how to start the conversation. First, we can start with a question. The first question we ask will depend on the situation, for example, approaching someone at a party, sitting next to someone in a classroom or on a bus, standing in line at a coffee shop, or walking across campus. Again, if our goal is to just have a friendly exchange, the question can be simple. For this reason, we can feel relaxed while we think of one. On the other hand, if we had the goal of getting a date, there would be a lot of pressure on us to think of something clever or funny or deep.

Also, we can start by giving the person a compliment. As Smith explains, everyone likes a compliment. And most people like to have other people notice them. So by paying them a compliment, we will probably make them feel noticed, which is one of our goals.

Another expert tip is to carefully look at the other person's body language. After we've started the conversation, perhaps with a question or compliment, we should notice how they react. If they smile and make eye contact with us, they probably are open to talking more. However, if they don't, it could be a signal that we should wait until they say something to us or ask us a question before trying to continue. If they look away from us, it's probably a sign that they would prefer not to have a conversation for some reason. Most of the time, the reason why the person is sending this signal is not because he or she thinks there is something wrong with us.

It's natural to feel a bit nervous about approaching an attractive stranger to start a conversation. However, we can feel comfortable if our goal is to help that person feel good or special and to have a pleasant experience, even if it is for just a few minutes.

## Starting a Conversation With an Attractive Stranger

### Comprehension Exercise

**Directions:** Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- \_\_\_ 1. Many people feel nervous about starting a conversation with their boyfriend or girlfriend.
- \_\_\_ 2. If you try to start a conversation with me, and I say, "I'm happy to meet you," it means that I rejected you.
- \_\_\_ 3. It's not a good idea to have the goal of getting the attractive person's phone number.
- \_\_\_ 4. We will feel less pressure if our goal is to just have a pleasant conversation.
- \_\_\_ 5. An example of a compliment is, "That's a great t-shirt you're wearing. I've never seen one like that."
- \_\_\_ 6. If a person doesn't seem to want to have a conversation with us, usually it's because they think we are strange.

### Paraphrasing Exercise

**Directions:** Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.

Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft. However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

### Key Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• attractive stranger</li><li>• phone number or date</li><li>• nervous</li><li>• fear of rejection</li><li>• overcome that obstacle</li><li>• goal</li><li>• feel good or special</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• only five minutes</li><li>• ask a question</li><li>• compliment</li><li>• feel noticed</li><li>• body language</li><li>• eye contact</li><li>• sending a signal</li></ul>
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## Reflection Exercise

**Directions:** Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*