

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Wednesday, 06 September 2017 05:06



Dear Aunt Bossy,

I'm a male and a Senior in High School. I'm smart and look ok. I have good manners and dress nicely, but am not rich or trendy. I work part-time at the grocery store.

Next year, I am going away to college, and want to be a different person. I'm sort of nerdy, and am not good at small talk, especially with girls. The only thing I have going for me is that I am at the top of my class and gifted in music. I can't compete with those stud types who do sports and know what to say all the time.

My friends are pretty much like me, and we all pretend like we don't care, but we do. Please give me some advice. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to re-create myself.

My parents think I am perfect, and don't understand.

Fondly,

Nerdy Ned

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Dear NN,

If I were an arriving freshman in college, you would probably be my dream guy. (Oh, yuck, I probably shouldn't have said that. Never mind this old lady. On the other hand, you are a refreshing change from the know it all boys I used to meet.)

I am jealous of your upcoming opportunity, but please realize it is not a "once in a lifetime opportunity." You get to "re-create" yourself over and over throughout your life. This may be the first time, but each time you will have more experience and knowledge to move forward. I'm jealous because you really will have a blank slate, supported by all the stuff that is good about you.

Your first step is to think seriously about what is good about you, what you enjoy the most in life, and what you like most about yourself. Write them down in detail, and edit weekly to see if your thoughts have changed. If you have someone in your life that is totally in your camp, ask him or her to take a look and give you feedback. Remind yourself of this good stuff constantly, and eliminate self-condemnation for the parts of your personality that you consider weak.

Ok, away you go. You have a year to practice. Get ready to make eye contact and speak to lots of people, even if it is just "hey." If they act like that is strange, so what. Don't change the approach because of the inhibitions of other people.

Never hesitate to introduce yourself to a person. I learned how to walk up to someone in a group or at an event and say, "Hi, I'm Aunt Bossy, who are you?" It took me years to get the courage to do that, but I've never had anyone reject me. In fact, it impresses people that you care enough to do that.

Once you start talking to another person, male or female, come up with a way to get them to talk. If you let them talk, they will automatically have higher regard for your intelligence than if you try to show it off. Don't worry, they will discover how smart you are.

If you are feeling particularly shy, you can say, "Meeting new people is always a challenge, how

do you approach it?" Try that with a person you suspect is just as socially awkward as you are. However, don't let it turn into a complaint session. If it starts going in that direction, ask, "How do we change that?"

Another conversation starter could be "I'm so excited to be here. What do you think about the place?" Then you listen with all your heart, and probe, using "for example?" and "how so?" - echoing a word or phrase, and adding a probe.

Here is a sample: If a person mentions sports, rather than get nervous because that isn't your area of expertise, say, "Sports? Tell me more." If, by some rare chance, they respond by saying "about what?" you can say, "You said you are interested in sports, and I wanted to find out more about that."

Naturally, your tone has to be friendly, and you have to discipline yourself to really pay attention and not think about what your next words will be.

I would suggest you practice with a friend. In fact, if I were you, I would attend a music event early on, find someone who is also interested in music, but who appears shy, and get him or her talking ("I really like this music. What brings you here?") so you can establish a friendship and get a wing person. There is nothing wrong with admitting that you want some support, and you would be helping the other person as well. Let it evolve. You don't have to hit them over the head with it immediately. That might be weird.

You mentioned girls, so I am assuming you are interested in them. Here goes: Learn to dance. Learn to cook two good meals, and, yes a crock-pot can be involved. Learn to show no-pressure affection. Develop old-fashioned manners. Pay lots of attention to what she says and does. Go do something new together. If you were interested in boys, I'd tell you the same thing.

Your interest in music is a door opener. If you attend events regularly, you will run into the same people, and you will have something to talk about. Also, join organizations that support the subjects and music you like. Volunteer.

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Enlarge your world. Sports have not been your thing, but this is a good time to find something physical you enjoy. Take martial arts, boxing, start working out at the gym. This will do wonders for our self-confidence. Do that this year. That way, when you arrive at college, you will know enough to decide how to follow up.

The key to all of this is to breathe and stop thinking about how nerve-wracking it is. Just focus on the other. If you don't get anywhere, move on. There are lots of people who would love to know you. Tell yourself that every day.

There is absolutely no reason to wait until next year to practice these skills. You might be amazed at how your life changes even before you hit the campus.

A strong word of advice: do not limit yourself to those you view as in the same boat you are. The kids who look great and are accomplished in areas where you are not are often nervous about social activity too. Trust me, I was gorgeous when I was young and in school and had no idea. I was so grateful for anyone who paid attention to me.

By the way, measure your progress in millimeters. Small changes bring big results over time. Start by making certain you give an impression of openness.

Go for it.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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