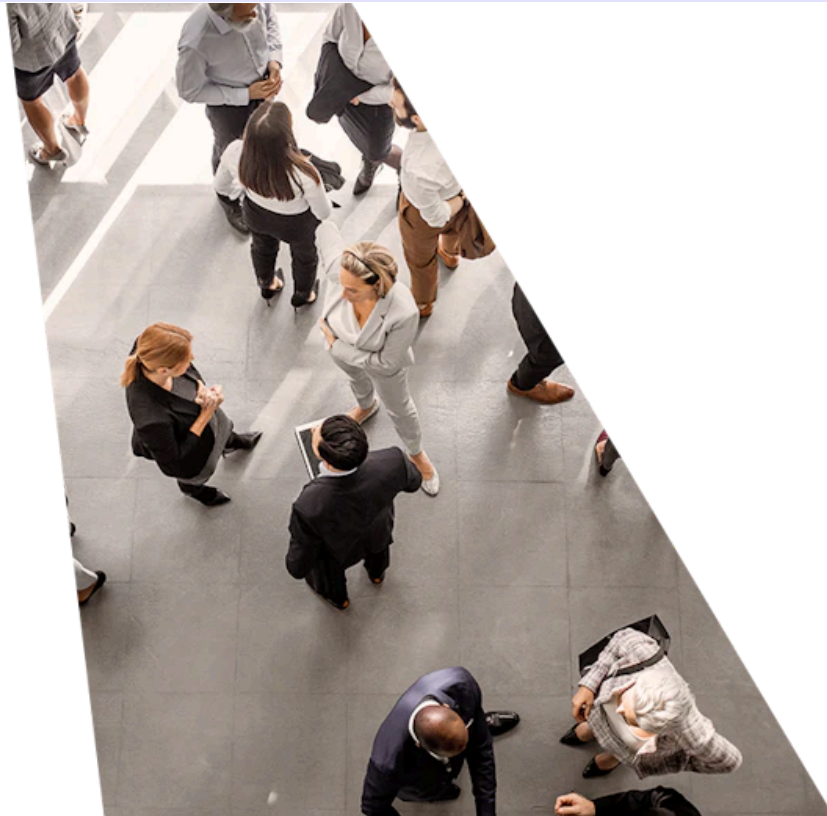


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How to meet new people when you work remotely

Becoming self-employed and working from home shouldn't have to mean that you feel lonely or isolated - here's some tips for making connections remotely.

[Networking and community](#) [Community](#) [Networking](#) [Remote & Co-working](#) 8 minutesShare     Jump to [Please select one](#)

Whether you miss chatting with colleagues, or chose to work for yourself to escape office politics and banter, many remote workers can struggle at times with socialising. It's a common problem reported in [IPSE Research](#), and various surveys and studies around the world (23% reported loneliness as a struggle in the [2023 Buffer State of Remote Work](#) survey). And the challenge has been heightened due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Just as becoming self-employed means taking on more responsibilities for business admin and promoting yourself, putting some effort into your social life can make a huge difference. It also allows you to tailor your socialising to your own personality, preferences, and other commitments.

You might not make lifelong friends on your first attempt, but it's worth persevering and trying different opportunities. Studies show that even brief chats with strangers can boost

your mood and life satisfaction ([SageJournals](#)), even when it's via an online video chat ([Science Advances](#)).

The first step is to commit to becoming more social, even if it feels a little uncomfortable at first.

Start conversations during random encounters with new people

Becoming a journalist required me to interview celebrities and random strangers, sometimes at very short notice. And that practice not only helped me overcome any childhood shyness, but carried over into chatting with shop assistants, delivery drivers and anyone else I might encounter.

It can be difficult, especially if you're more introverted, but gets easier with practice. Especially if it doesn't go well. But just like when clients reject a proposal, it's often nothing personal – they might just be tired, stressed, or also nervous about chatting.

Don't enter into a conversation expecting it to be life-changing, but fairly innocuous and open questions can have surprising results. I've found out about various work opportunities, interesting local community projects, and lots more, just by chatting with random strangers.



Weak social ties can also grow stronger online

I have a number of fairly strong connections with people I've never met in real life, or only rarely see due to our locations and other commitments. Many have started through social networks or forums around work or shared hobbies, and grown over time through project referrals and collaborations, or shared hobbies.

These can often lead to an easier connection if you do eventually meet up in real life, as you'll already have some things to talk about. Going to large industry conferences can also be a lot more comfortable if you arrange to go with someone you already know a little online.

Within the [IPSE Community](#), you can find a member forum, alongside open Facebook and LinkedIn groups, as well as local meet-ups or larger events, which are perfect for meeting other self-employed people.

It can take time to make new friendships online, just as in the physical world. Over time it can progress to virtual coffees or cocktails, a gaming session, or regular co-working. And with family and work commitments, it can be easier to catch up with friends during a game of Call of Duty or FIFA, rather than trying to get everyone to the pub or golf course.

Use your existing social network

Even if your friends and family aren't located nearby, there's a good chance they might know someone in your area. Which can be incredibly helpful, especially if you've moved to a new location.

Having a mutual connection gives you something in common with friends of friends. And having them guide you around their favourite places will introduce you to the area, giving you some potential places to start hanging out more regularly. It also means there's a pre-arranged conversation starter to break the ice.

If you had a good relationship with a former boss or colleague, they could also be a great accountability buddy or [mentor](#) if you need some advice on moving forwards with your self-employed career.

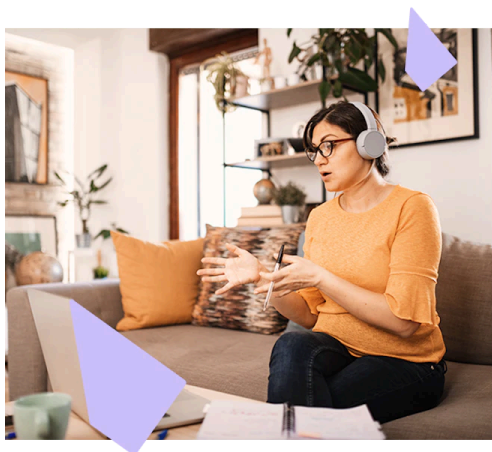
Start attending local events and meetups

As with work-related events, there's likely to be a range of sports and hobby groups in your area offering the chance to meet up for social activities.

Being active also brings [physical](#) and [mental](#) benefits beyond socialising. And there are plenty of lower-impact, non-competitive options, whether it's walking, swimming, Tai Chi, golf, archery, pilates or yoga which are accessible if you're looking to get a little fitter and more social without attempting to become an Olympic athlete or run an ultramarathon.

Hobby groups can also be a great way to meet people around a shared interest, and you can often find a range listed on council websites, Meetup, Eventbrite, or organised by local businesses (for example, board game cafes and Warhammer stores, arts and crafts, cooking, astronomy and stargazing, nature walks and gardening, etc).

And if you're a fan of sport rather than a participant, there may be volunteer opportunities to get involved with a local team or facility. That could be as a steward or marshal, leading events, or even commentating on the action.



Volunteering

Donating some of your time and knowledge can be a great way to meet people, and to help a worthwhile cause at the same time. Along with sports teams, many local charities and groups rely on volunteers to function, and will welcome any new people who can provide some support.

There are lots of useful sites to find volunteer opportunities, including [DofE](#), [Volunteering Matters](#), the [National Association for Voluntary and Community Action](#), The [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#), which lists local centres across England (along with the [Volunteer Scotland](#) and [Volunteering Wales](#) websites), and the professional skills-based [Reach Volunteering](#).

Many local organisations are in constant need of volunteers, including schools, hospitals, community centres, animal sanctuaries, or environmental organisations.

Along with meeting new people, it can also be a great way to learn new skills, or refresh your existing knowledge.

Become a regular

It can be a little uncomfortable the first time you attend a co-working space, coffee shop, café, or pub on your own, but after a while you'll get to know the staff and other regulars.

Supporting smaller, local establishments also means you'll find out about any events they are planning, as you build up a natural rapport over time. Many places will offer quiz nights or other social gatherings to attract trade, so you can often find opportunities to meet people from your local community.

Physical and virtual coworking

IPSE members get access to [unlimited co-working](#) via our partnership with AndCo, and spending one or two days in a different location can benefit your social life, alongside your business. In addition to a professional location for meetings, it's also a great way to meet other business owners and freelancers.

Many coworking spaces offer areas for socialising, and often hold regular events to meet other members. Plus, you're likely to bump into people organically if you're working from the same venue reasonably often.

But if you don't fancy relocating from your home office, or there's not a location nearby, then virtual coworking can still provide some of the benefits. Various groups organise formal sessions via online meeting platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or you can always start your own with like minded friends and acquaintances, and then open it up to new people.

Conclusion

Working from home doesn't mean you have to feel lonely or isolated. Even a small amount of effort and commitment can make a huge difference to your emotional state and [mental wellbeing](#). Like most aspects of becoming self-employed, you have the freedom to create a social life which is perfectly suited to your own needs, rather than being forced to attend work functions and put up with colleagues and office politics that might not be beneficial.

One of the great things about being self-employed is discovering the amazing network of other people willing to share advice and support. And most of us will have experienced similar struggles at various times in our career.

If you find yourself struggling with long-term feelings of loneliness and isolation, it's also worth contacting organisations set up to support mental health and wellbeing, including [CALM](#), the [Mental Health Foundation](#), [Mind](#) and [Samaritans](#), the [NHS](#) or your GP.

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