

Ep #346: Drinking When You're Meeting New People



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 346.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host, Rachel Hart.

Alright, everybody, we're going to be talking about drinking when you meet someone new. I was actually doing an article recently, or an interview for an article, about alcohol and dating. It really got me thinking about why do we drink when we meet new people, and it applies both to romantic and platonic situations.

Sometimes you're meeting someone for a first date. Sometimes it's heading out to a neighborhood meet-up. Whatever it is, I think a lot of people realize that drinking in these settings is so ingrained. So ingrained, that it's just easier when you have a drink in your hand to meet someone new. Certainly, this was true for me.

When I first took a break from drinking, where I was really about reevaluating my relationship with alcohol and understanding why I had all this desire, I will tell you that I had a lot of worries about both dating, because I was single at the time, and meeting new people.

My brain was a little bit like, "Ah, I don't know if this is going to work, because this is what we do. We go on dates, we make new friends, and we have a drink in our hand. That's what we do. Otherwise, I'm just going to feel really weird and anxious and awkward."

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For a long time, I was in a situation where it just felt like, I don't know, maybe this is just impossible without a drink. But I'm here to tell you that it's not impossible. So, we're going to talk today about why we do this, why we have this kind of ingrained pattern with drinking when we're meeting new people. We're talking about also, is it okay, should we be doing this, and what you can do instead?

Now, I always ask people, I think it's really helpful to kind of back up and consider, just remind yourself, you have a lot of practice meeting new people, and making friends, and figuring out how to do this without drinking. We all do because we all did this as kids. We were constantly meeting new people and trying to navigate social situations and form friendships. And we were doing this without a drink, without alcohol.

I'm not saying that it was easy, and free of anxiety and that you never had any awkward moments. I'm not saying that that's true, because I will tell you, it definitely was not true for me. But I just want you to back up and remember that you did do this for many, many years of your life.

I will tell you, I am watching my five-year-old right now go through a lot of this. He came back from school yesterday; he started kindergarten, and he's on the big kid playground. He was saying to me, at one point, he turned around and he couldn't find any of his friends. He couldn't find any of the other kindergarteners, it was all just big kids, and he had no one to play with.

Because finding somebody to play with would have meant going up to a bigger kid that he doesn't know and trying to join in and introducing himself. And so, instead, he told me, "Mama, I just played by myself." I think most of us can relate, right?

We can relate to those moments where you show up to summer camp, and you don't know anyone, right? Or you start a new school, or you're making

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the switch from elementary school to middle school, and suddenly you're surrounded by a lot of kids that you don't know. We're constantly, throughout life, we're constantly facing these sorts of interactions.

Some of you are just like me, and you remember, whether it was summer camp or starting a new school or going to high school, you remember feeling, in these moments, really kind of unsure. Where do I fit in? Maybe feeling a little anxious or awkward. I will tell you, that was so much of my experience of trying to navigate both friendships and romantic relationships in my early years.

And so, when I got to college, that's when I started to drink. I was like, "Oh my God! Wait, what? You can have a drink, and then you can not feel anxious or awkward? This is the best! Why has this been hidden from me? Sign me up. This is amazing." All of a sudden, it was like I had this magic elixir that had been hiding from me my entire life.

For me, when I started drinking in college, it felt like, oh, this is the ticket, right? This is my ticket to no longer be the anxious, socially awkward version of myself. Now, I can just meet people and it's just easy. But here's the thing, the more I relied on the drink, the more, internally, I started to feel like I needed it.

I started to really feel like navigating these situations on my own was almost intolerable. Like, if there's not going to be something to drink there, why would I go? No, thank you. Even though I loved, I loved, that I have this remedy, I just pour a drink when I'm meeting new people, and then I don't have to feel anxious. Part of me didn't like it.

Part of me felt like I don't want to be that person. I don't want to feel like I need a drink. I kept waiting to outgrow my anxiety, and I kept getting older and still, it was there. I was coaching someone on this recently. She was in

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her 60s, and she was just like, “I can't believe I still feel anxious in social situations. This is so stupid.”

But part of the problem is this belief that we're just supposed to outgrow that feeling in your stomach when you're meeting someone new. I kept waiting for the same thing to happen to me, and it wasn't happening. I think what's really important here is not to demonize, not to make it wrong or bad to drink in these situations.

It's not about deciding, okay, no, you should never do it. It's not about kind of labeling the friendships or relationships that you form without alcohol as somehow more virtuous than the ones that form with it. It's not about that. What I just want all of you to do, is just kind of slow down, get curious, and see if a part of you might be similar to how I was feeling for a long time. That a part of you might be in this kind of internal tug of war.

On the one hand, it's great to have a drink there by your side to ease your anxiety, lubricate the situation, and make it less awkward. But on the other hand, there might be this little part of you, and maybe it's this just kind of quiet whisper, this intuition. It's like, “Yeah, am I ever going to get past this?”

Maybe you might be a little frustrated that you're still relying on the drink, not because it's bad, that's not what I'm saying here. But because part of you doesn't want to have to rely on anything. I would watch people in social situations who just naturally seemed at ease. They didn't seem all twisted in knots on the inside. They didn't seem like they had all these hangups going into it when they were meeting new people.

Deep down, that's what I really desired. I didn't want to need a drink. Because that's how I felt, I felt like I needed it. I didn't want to go into these situations with so many hang-ups and all this anxiety. I will add, there was also the added complication that the more nervous I felt, the more that I

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would drink, right? Because it just felt so intolerable. The more I could drink over the anxiety, the less tolerance I had to any anxiety.

I remember many situations where I'd be waiting for someone to show up for a date and they were late. I'm at the bar ready, I'm still feeling really nervous, and suddenly I'm two drinks in before they even arrive. So, the more I had intense emotion, the more nervous I felt, the more that I would end up drinking. I didn't like that either.

But here's what I realized. What I realized, and I'll tell you this, I had to take a break from drinking in order to make this realization. But what I realized was that when I was going out and meeting new people, whether it was a potential romantic partner, or just trying to make new friends, outwardly, I would have said, "Yeah, I'm trying to just find people that I can connect with. That's my goal. I want to find someone I can gel with." But inwardly, there was a totally different calculation going on.

That inward calculation, that was happening, that's what was triggering so much anxiety for me. On the inside, I was really fixated on whether or not people liked me. Do I fit in? Am I saying the right thing? Do I sound smart? Do I look right? Does this guy think that I'm attractive? All the internal calculations on the inside, they were about whether or not these other people were finding me acceptable. Was I acceptable to them?

I was so much more focused, almost entirely focused to be honest, on do they like me rather than do I like them? And guess what? When your inner dialogue is all about that, asking those questions; do I sound smart? Am I talking too much? Too little? Do I look right? Do they find me attractive? Guess what? It's going to create a lot of anxiety.

Then, this is how the think-feel-act cycle works: That internal chatter, that's creating all that anxiety, the brain thinks, "Oh, the solution is a drink. Let's just drink over it, so I don't have to feel it." But that's why I wasn't

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outgrowing my anxiety in these situations because alcohol wouldn't let me. I didn't even realize that this internal chatter was really fully there. I didn't have this awareness that I was going into these situations really fixated on whether or not I was acceptable, was I okay to them?

So, I didn't really understand that the chatter was there. I didn't see how that chatter was creating my anxiety. I didn't really even see another way. And so, I wasn't questioning these thoughts. They were just becoming more and more entrenched. More and more of the actual habit was this thought pattern that I had developed.

I became really, really good at worrying whether or not people liked me and what they thought of me, and that created a lot of anxiety. Then I was trying to deal with anxiety by drinking. Then I was having anxiety about the fact that I needed a drink in social situations, and why wasn't I growing out of this? It was kind of snowballing, right?

Because here I am wondering, "Geez, Rachel. I mean, are you ever going to grow out of this? Are you ever going to feel normal in these situations? Can you ever just be yourself without a drink?" Again, it's not to say that you shouldn't drink in these situations. But I see this over and over again.

I see that when you start to have this kind of quiet, inner knowing, or this intuition that something just feels a little off about your relationship with alcohol, what I'm offering for you is just to be curious about what's going on? What is that desire about? Not to make your drinking wrong, but to get curious. Hey, what else is going on here?

Yes, maybe on the surface, it's like I just want to ease those first date jitters, or the anxiety I have when I meet new people. But if you could get curious and ask yourself, why is it there in the first place? Is it there because your mind, like my mind, had it all backwards? My primary focus

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was all about what other people were thinking of me, whether I was acceptable to them, rather than the other way around.

So, getting curious is really part of seeing, you don't need social lubrication to get to know people. You don't need alcohol to make a first date tolerable, or meet-ups with people easier. In fact, spending years, if not decades like I did, relying on a drink in these situations may be making it harder for you.

Maybe some level of the jitters and anxiety and awkwardness is normal. What would happen if you told yourself that it was normal? It's normal to feel this way when you're meeting someone new. Not to make it a problem. What would happen if you looked at what was creating it? You started to notice how your brain was really fixated on whether or not you were acceptable? Whether or not this person liked you, rather than switching your focus? Starting to think about, "Hey, what do I think of them?"

Because I was bringing all this backwards thinking to these situations, and then judging myself for feeling so anxious about the fact that I needed a drink. Then, of course, judging myself for drinking too much. But really, if you want these things to be easier, these moments to be easier, can you start from the place of flipping the script? Changing where you put your attention.

It's so obvious, but it really is such a profound and radical shift to have in these moments, to start thinking about, "Hey, what do I think about this person?" Not in some sort of judgmental way, but to just go from that place of, maybe that's what matters most, what I think about them, rather than what they think about me.

Here's the thing, just to be totally upfront here, I still have to practice this all the time. My brain has decades of practicing thoughts like, do I look okay? Was that stupid, what I just said? Do I fit in? Does this person find me

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attractive? Am I sounding smart? I have so much practice with all of that internal chatter.

But here's the thing, I know it's there. I'm so much faster at noticing it happening, and now I can use it as a cue, a little kind of signal. "Hey, wait a moment. Let's flip the script right now." And so, that's what I want to offer all of you guys today.

The next time that you're feeling anxious when you're around someone new, whether you're in a romantic setting or not, to ask yourself: Hey, what's happening? Why am I feeling anxious? Before you immediately go for that drink, just pause and notice if your internal chatter is all about whether or not the person you're with finds you acceptable.

If that's the case, see if you can flip it around. What would it be like to just change your perspective? From "Does this person like me?" to "Hey, do I like them? What do I think of them?" It's totally fascinating to just watch your brain at work in these moments. To be like, "Oh, right." It matters. In fact, the most important thing is what I think, right? Whether or not I am connecting with them.

So, just try that out. I still have a little anxiety in social situations, and when I'm meeting someone new, but it doesn't feel anywhere near as debilitating as it used to feel. It really did use to feel like, "I mean, if we're not drinking, I just don't even want to bother going. This is just too anxiety producing for me." It's still there. But I've learned how to normalize it. I've learned how to question where it's coming from, and I've learned how to redirect my mind.

Then, all of a sudden, you start to see that your desire to drink maybe is about a desire to just deal with these thoughts that you hadn't even realized were the root cause of the anxiety.

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Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up. Changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out.

It starts with my 30-Day Challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change.

Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly empowered to take it or leave it. Head on over to www.RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.