

Find your people



It's all about seizing opportunities when it comes to making new friends Down Under, writes Karen Bleakley

When we moved to Australia, one of the things that worried me the most was not having a support network. With three young kids, and a husband doing shift work an hour away, I knew I was going to have to deal with any emergencies that came up on my own.

There was that time when our youngest (aged two) fell off her brother's cabin bed and landed, head first, on the corner of a wooden toy box (she was okay, thankfully), or the time I got ready to pick up the kids from school and I found my car had a flat battery, or the time it was



Karen (centre) with her friends Melanie (left) and Belinda (right)

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raining so hard that I was worried our rental was going to flood because of a blocked drain at the side of the house or during another storm when our pool was about to overflow and I couldn't work out how to start the drain function. Typically, tricky situations always seem to happen when I'm parenting solo!

Having trusted friends and neighbours gives you a safety net. It means you have someone to help watch the kids if you need to do a quick stop at the emergency room, or if you need someone to give you a jump start or to collect the kids for you from school, or you need someone to come over for a cuppa on a stormy day to assure you that the drain is working even though it looks overwhelmed with the deluge of rainwater. Or you need help draining a pool at 7am on a Sunday morning.

When we arrived in Australia, we needed to get used to asking for help. You can't do everything on your own, and you don't need to.

Having people to call on when you need help is only half the story though. For your own mental health, you need to find your people – people you can share your ups and downs with. People you feel relaxed around. People you can hang out and have fun with. You need friends, and your friends will soon start to feel like family, so that it stops feeling weird if you have to ring them at 6am in an emergency, or if they have to call you for help at 11pm. The support network works both ways!

The question is: where do you meet these new friends when you arrive and don't know anybody? Every day you will find opportunities to meet people. At the

park with the kids, at work, at the school drop-off, at toddler groups, in local Facebook groups, at expat meet-ups, at business networking events, at sports clubs, and don't forget your neighbours...

Friends can come from all sorts of places. It's all about seizing opportunities and making the effort. Invite people for coffee, find them on Facebook or swap phone numbers – but make sure you have a way of contacting them again.

Making friends is half of the battle to settling in here. It doesn't matter how incredible your life is if you don't have people you care about to share it with. Everything is much more fun when you have friends. 🇺🇸

■ Karen Bleakley helps families take the stress out of moving to Australia at www.SmartStepstoAustralia.com.