How to Help!

Hello, **Adventurer!** You are reading this because you are considering contributing to your D&D group beyond your delightful presence at the table. Though additional contribution does require additional time, much of consequence can be done in the time it takes to drink a cup of your favorite beverage, and the effects will be felt almost immediately by yourself and your friends.

Below you'll find a loosely-ordered list of useful activities starting with those that offer the most benefit with the least effort. You can do as many or as few of them as you like in any combination, but I recommend starting from the top.

Helpful Activities

1. Learn Your Character's Abilities

Most of your abilities stem from your class, so the relevant class page in the player's handbook (PHB) will cover 80% of what you need. Run through the common situations, like performing an attack or casting a spell, and make sure that the dice and modifiers make sense to you.

Writing down the detailed text of your abilities and spells on paper or copy-pasting it into a single digital file can make reference later much easier. If you do it right once, you can avoid racking your brain for every ability you possess when your turn rolls around, allowing you think less about mechanics and more about how to get your character into trouble.

2. Leave Your Phone

You are busy, but agreeing to play D&D together is agreeing to give each other our time and attention. D&D is especially vulnerable to the consequences of inattention, because most of the game only exists in our minds and is maintained by speech. If a player tries to narrate their actions, but nobody hears it, it doesn't happen, and that can be discouraging for all involved.

3. Level Up Your Character

Or don't.

4. Create Some Goals

List 3 things that your character wants and 3 things that you want as a player. Communicate these to your DM, even if he would appear to be your adversary; if you trick the DM and backstab some important NPC by surprise, you might find the interactions that follow and the loot gained to be of a generic, seemingly-improvised quality. Signaling intentions can lead to richer rewards and reasonable, interesting developments.

5. Add backstory.

A character is not locked-in at the beginning of session 1. You often find, as plays continues over multiple sessions, that the character you thought would be exciting or quirky to play is actually flat in their personality and limited in their behaviors. This can lead to waning interest in social encounters and engagement in general.

The solution is simply to add details to your backstory and personality, whatever they may be: previous jobs, places you've lived, relatives, friends, enemies, hobbies, or interests. Don't suddenly add "Master Locksmith" to your backstory the second a safe needs cracking, but know that you have an incredible amount of creative freedom, and that developments requiring considerable accommodation are also very (if not more) welcome. This process of expanding the character backstory is often done in tandem with creating new goals.

It is difficult to overstate how much can be added to the world to accommodate a backstory. Need a castle in the jungle to hold your evil cousin? Cool. You family is infamous for their love of squirrel cheese and you need cheese makers to talk shit to? Sure. Your goal in life is to find the limited edition of a children's book just like the one your kidnapped mother used to read to you, and you need bookstores to travel to? Why not? If you want something, we'll find a way.

6. Conspire With Your Party

The process of turning individual goals into collective action can be some of the most rewarding social interaction in the game. Sure, your characters are "friends", but why should you travel for 2 weeks through dangerous territory to save the sister of someone you met a week ago? "What's in it for me?" can be a very valid response, as can, "Sounds great!". And if your character isn't inclined to negotiate or extort, perhaps they have an interest of their own that aligns them with the rest of the party, at least for now.

   These sorts of plans can be shared with players before the session, but consider channeling them through character interaction within a session during the downtime of travel or resting in town.

7. Organize Your Abilities

Though some character abilities are multipurpose, most have very specific uses. I recommend writing out common scenarios and determining which of your abilities (spells, attacks, racial abilities, class abilities, items, etc) would be helpful in that scenario. Try answering some of the questions below, and get creative if you can.

What abilities do you have that...

- ...help manipulate a conversation in your favor?
- ...help hide, run away, or disguise yourself when the guards are on the way?
- ...save yourself when you are close to dying?
- ...rescue an ally from combat?
- ...support an ally in combat?
- ...prepare for or recover from combat?
- ...trigger when you take damage?
- ...deal a regular amount of damage to some enemy?
- ...deal as much damage as possible to or disable a single enemy?
- ...deal a bunch of damage to a cluster of enemies?

   The answers to these questions can be used for quick reference, whether in combat or social encounters, saving everyone time and potentially reminding you of a cool ability at just the right moment. Try coming up with some other questions that are relevant to your character and answering those too.

8. Casual Reading

A great source of inspiration is the player's handbook (PHB). Everytime that I read even a couple of pages, I learn something new or forgotten that gives me ideas about what to do next time I play. The parts most relevant to you are collected in the table.

Pages	Content
6-14	The Basics
45-119	Classes
145	Armor Table
149	Weapon Table
150	Adventuring Gear
173-179	Using Ability Scores
165-170	Feats
189-198	Combat
201-205	Spellcasting