

PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS



Social Connections and Your Health

Devoting time to improving your mental and emotional health is important, but you will still need the company of others to feel and function at your best. Humans are social creatures and we thrive when we have positive connections with others. Our social brains crave companionship – even those who would describe themselves as shy or introverted.

How High Social Connection Benefits Your Health and Well-Being

People with strong supportive relationships tend to live happier and longer lives. They are more satisfied, more motivated, and have better psychological well-being. Research has shown healthy relationships also benefit our physical health. People in healthy relationships heal more quickly, have lower blood pressure, and have a reduced risk of obesity and inflammation which can lead to more serious health issues.

According to Research...



Feeling like we belong in our community and have people to confide in are strong indicators of general and mental health.



Healthy behaviours like exercise and eating well are more likely to be reported by those with greater social connectedness.



People with strong social connections have a 50% greater chance of longevity.

There are some key ways that strong connections, meaningful relationships, and regular social interactions help support our health and well-being:

- 1 Relationships provide a source of support during difficult or challenging situations. Conversations with a good, empathetic listener can help relieve stress and help you process emotions.
- 2 Relationships help provide people with purpose and meaning. Our friends and family are important to us and we want to be there for them – just as they are for us. We also tend to share at least some values and priorities with these key people in our lives, so your relationship helps to reinforce their significance.
- 3 Healthy relationships can encourage positive and healthy behaviours. We are influenced by the habits of those we spend time with, so if our friends, family members, and co-workers make healthy choices, we are more likely to.



What Makes a Healthy Relationship?



Unhealthy relationships can quickly become a source of stress, so it's important to pursue relationships with people who encourage healthy habits and provide support. Supportive social networks come in different forms and play different roles in your life depending on the situation.

Emotional Support

This type of support is important during times of stress or when people are feeling sad or lonely. It's the friend you call when you learn bad news, or your spouse when you want to unwind after a long day at the office.

Instrumental Support

These people care for your physical needs and offer a helping hand when you need it: the neighbour that brings you a hot meal when your sick or the co-worker that gives you a ride when your car is in the shop.

Informational Support

When making decisions or navigating a new situation, there are those we go to for guidance and advice: your mom when you have questions about kids or an experienced colleague when making a career change.

Communication. Express and receive thoughts, ideas, and feelings openly. Without open communication, social connection is virtually impossible.

Respect. Treat others how they want to be treated. Respect their characteristics, values, and ideas – even if they don't always match your own.

Honesty. Your words must match your actions. Being honest means sharing expectations for yourself and the other person, admitting mistakes, and expressing how you feel.

Dependability. Keep your commitments and promises and be present for the other person, both physically and emotionally.

Empathy. Focus on understanding what someone is going through and how they feel before trying to respond to it or fix it. This is the ultimate sign of support.

Interdependence. A relationship is stronger when neither party relies too much on the other. Have a solid foundation on your own, separate from the other person and your relationship.

Purpose. Understand the reason for your connection: what each of you gain, and what makes it worth your time and effort. This allows you to maximize the value of the relationship.



Tips For Connecting with Others

- **Plan to meet.** Everyone is busy and it's easy to miss opportunities to see friends and family. Schedule a get-together so you don't forget.
- **Get out from behind your screens.** While technology can help us stay connected, it can't fulfill our social needs. Make time for face-to-face interaction.
- **Reach out to acquaintances.** If you don't feel like you have anyone to call, make new connections. Invite a co-worker for lunch, reconnect with an old friend, or ask a neighbour to coffee.
- **Be a joiner.** Join networking or social groups that meet regularly. It's a great way to meet people with common interests.
- **Say hi to strangers.** Don't be afraid to smile at those you cross paths with. It's a simple way to connect and you never know where it may lead.

LONELINESS IS NOT THE SAME THING AS SOLITUDE. BEING LONELY IS A PROBLEM, BUT BEING ALONE MAY NOT BE A PROBLEM AT ALL! MANY PEOPLE LIVE ALONE AND HAVE HAPPY AND FULFILLING LIVES. UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU NEED AND WANT WHEN IT COMES TO RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

Sources www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/building-better-mental-health.htm | www.vch.ca/Documents/MHMC-SocialConnections-Report.pdf | www.wechu.org/sites/default/files/workplace%20wellness/ease%20your%20mind/relationship_bulletin_FINAL.PDF | Images from Freepik.com