

Social Connectedness (Youth)


haveTHAT talk



Building Social Connections

What are Social Connections?

Social connections are the relationships we have with the people around us. They are the relationships we have at school, work, and at home. These relationships affect our physical and mental health. Good social connections help us build our resilience. They also help improve our physical and mental health. Better health helps us to better cope with the stresses of life.¹

Social connections can strengthen your immune system, lower blood pressure, help you recover from illness faster and can even lengthen your life.^{2, 3}

How to Build Stronger Connections:

Prioritize

It is important to spend quality time with the people in your life who matter the most to you. Schedule or plan times when you can connect with these people, whether it be online or in-person. Maintaining a balance between your online and in-person life is a good way to build your social connections.

Participate

Getting involved and sharing experiences makes us feel like we belong and gives us the chance to meet new people while having fun. A good way to do this is by joining groups with people who share a common interest as you, or volunteering at community events in your neighbourhood.

Reach Out

There are times when we need extra help. When you are having a tough time, reach out for support. Try to accept help and think of ways you can help others.

Calling a friend or speaking to a trusted person can help you cope with difficulties and gives you a chance to share and learn from others. Speak to a health professional or community resource if you need more help.

Additional Resources

English

- [Promoting Positive Mental Health](#)
- [Relationships and Peer Support](#)
- [YouthNet Learning Hub](#)

French

- [Centre-d'apprentissage \(Réseau Ado\)](#)
- [Promotion de la santé mentale positive](#)
- [Relations et soutien par les pairs](#)

¹ Yang YC, et al. (2015). Social relationships and physiological determinants of longevity across the human life span. PNAS, 113(3): 578-583

² Seppala E. (2014). *Social connection improves physical health and mental and emotional well-being*. Retrieved from: <https://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>

³ House HS, Landis KR, Umberson D. (1988). *Social relationships and health*. Science. Vol. 241(4865) 540-545

Activity 1: Who Are Your Connections?

Goal

- To identify the people in your life who can support you.
- To discover ways to improve the connections you have.

Messages

- Poor social connections and relationships can have negative impacts on your life.
- There are times when we all need a little extra help. Being okay with accepting help and offering it to others is important.
- Technology can help us reach out to friends or learn about events in our community. It can be a great tool to make connections. Social media is a good way to plan activities and stay in touch with loved ones. However, depending on the type of technology we use and how much we use it, technology can harm our relationships and our physical and mental health.
- Sharing your struggles online can sometimes be helpful, but people can say hurtful things. Know who your supports are so that you can reach out for help. Trusted resources such as [MediaSmarts](#) can help you or your family stay safe.
- Knowing how to identify a [trusted adult](#), and knowing how to identify one can be life-saving. A trusted adult can help you feel listened to, respects your boundaries, and can help you find support.

Time

- 10-15 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [“Building Social Connections.”](#)
- Flip chart paper and markers.
- Print one “*Make Your Connections Stronger!*” worksheet for each participant.

Activity

- View the video: “*Building Social Connections.*”
- Using flip chart paper, draw a stick person in the centre of the page.
- Ask participants to name people they get support from at home/school/work/community.
- Place these names around the stick person.
- Ask participants what type of support they get from the people they identified (e.g., helps with childcare, listens to them).
- Use a different coloured marker and add their responses under the supports identified.
- Hand out one “*Make Your Connections Stronger!*” worksheet to each participant and ask them to complete it.
- Ask if anyone wants to share ideas on how they could support one of the important people on their list.

Possible Answers

Who we get support from:

- Parents, other family members, friends, colleagues, co-workers, support services, teachers, coaches.

What type of support:

- Help with homework, helping with chores, yard work, driving to activities, financial support, listening.

Ways to support or strengthen relationships:

- Thank them, spend more time together, call/text/video-chat more, do something nice for them, write to them, tell them how you feel about them and why they are important to you.

Worksheet: Make Your Connections Stronger!

Write a list of people who support you and one type of support you receive from each person.

Example 1: Coach – Gives me support and encourages me to do my best.

Example 2: Friend – Hangs out with me and cheers me up when I'm sad.

Write how you can support your list of people.

Example 1: Coach – Offering to help with setting up before the game.

Example 2: Friend – Offering to help with homework after-school.

Name one relationship that is really important to you.

Example 1: Grandfather.

Example 2: Siblings.

Write down one thing you can do this week to support or strengthen this relationship.

Example 1: Grandfather – visit or call him this week.

Example 2: Siblings – Set up a game night and bake their favourite snacks.

Strong social connections help build our resilience, improve our physical and mental health and help us cope with the stresses of life.



Activity 2: Reach Out to Make Connections

Goal

- To discover ways to strengthen your existing connections or to make new ones.

Messages

- It can be very hard to get out of the cycle of loneliness and isolation. Barriers such as fear, lack of transportation or lack of money can keep us from reaching out to others.
- Connecting with others can help improve your mental and physical health. Being an active member of your community can also make it easier for others to reach out to you.
- There are many ways that you can increase your connections in the community including connecting with services, joining groups, clubs or sports, participating in community activities or events, and volunteering.

Time

- 10 minutes, plus time to research/brainstorm.

Supplies

- Video: [*“Building Social Connections.”*](#)
- Technology, for example: Wi-Fi, computer access, smart phones, if available.
- Print one [*“Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health”*](#) list for each participant to take home.
- Flip chart paper, blank paper, marker and pens.

Activity

- View the video: *“Building Social Connections.”*
- Ask participants to use their technology to locate various community agencies or service centres one can use for support. Brainstorm different possibilities if no technology is available.
- Ask the participants to share what they have found.
- Write their answers on flip chart paper and discuss each answer with the group (what supports are offered? Where are they located? Etc.,)

Possible Answers

A person can:

- Take a course, join a team, try a fitness activity, join a special interest club, volunteer at a retirement home or community centre.

Where someone can start looking:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| • 211 (community organization) | • Community Centres |
| • 311 (municipal activities) | • Volunteer Ottawa |
| • School/place of work | • Faith Centre |