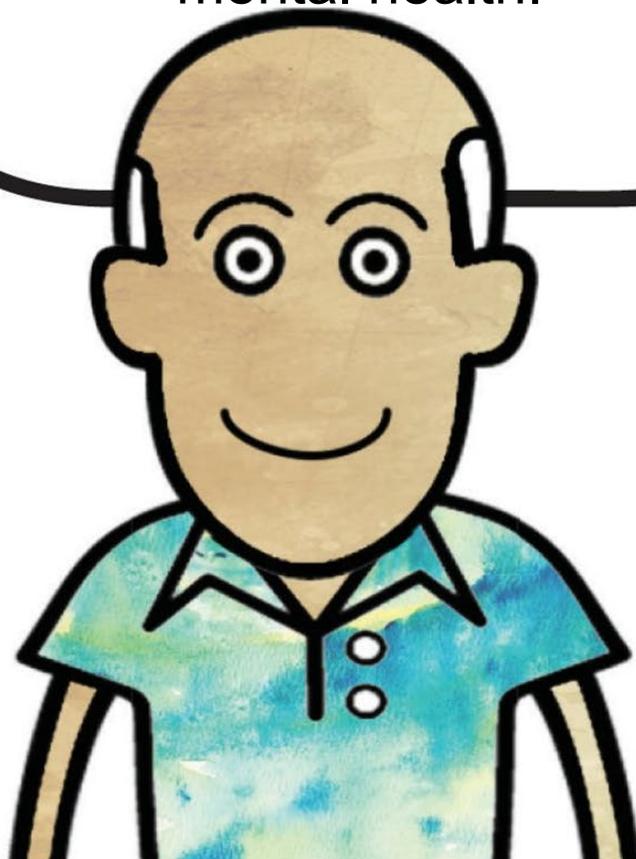


Building social connectedness

Social connections are the **relationships** we have with the people around us. The relationships we have at **school, work, in leisure and at home** affect our physical and mental health.



Building Social Connections

What are Social Connections?

Social connections are the relationships we have with the people around us. The relationships we have at school, work, in leisure and at home affect our physical and mental health. Good social connections help build our resilience, improve our physical and mental health and help us cope with the stresses of life.¹³

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 in person with these people.

Participate

Getting involved and sharing experiences makes us feel like we belong and gives us the chance to meet new people while having fun. Join a group with people who share a common interest or volunteer at a community event 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 when someone offers it to you 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 your health care professional if you need more help.

Additional Resources

Resources are hyperlinked. If printing this activity guide, please review resources online.

Websites

English:

- [Be Social](#)
- [Do you have a support network? Together, we can build one](#)
- [Social Support](#)
- [Measuring Positive Mental Health in Canada: Social support](#)

French:

- [Es-tu bien entouré? Un réseau, ça se construit!](#)
- [Être social](#)
- [Mesurer la santé mentale positive au Canada : Soutien social](#)

¹³ Yang YC, et al. (2015). Social relationships and physiological determinants of longevity across the human life span. PNAS, 113(3): 578-583

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

- Not being connected affects your health as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is a greater risk to you than obesity.¹⁴
- There are times when we need a little extra help. Accept help and offer help to others. Relationships are stronger when both people help and learn from each other.
- Technology can help us reach out to friends or learn about events in our community. Use social media to plan a get-together or contact an old friend. But remember that in-person contact is the best way to create stronger connections.¹⁵

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 (page 52).

Facilitator Steps

1. Watch the video: Building Social Connections
2. Using flip chart paper, draw a stick person in the centre of the page.
3. Ask participants to name people from whom they get support at home/school/work/community.
4. Place these names around the stick person.
5. Ask participants what type of support they get from the people they identified, ex: helps with work, babysits, etc.
6. Use another color marker and add participants’ answers under the names identified.
7. Hand out one Make Your Connections Stronger worksheet for each participant.
8. Ask participants to complete the worksheet.
9. Ask if anyone wants to share some ideas about how they could support one of the important people on their list.

Possible Participants’ Answers

Who we get support from:

- Parents, children, other family relatives, friend, colleagues, support services, teacher, coach

What type of support:

- Help with homework, cleaning, cooking, driving to activities, financial support – paying for things, listening, problem solving, sounding board and someone to lean on.

¹⁴ Holt-Lunstad J, Smith T, Layton J. (2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLoS Med 7(7).

¹⁵ Holt-Lunstad J, et al. (2015). Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. Perspect Psychol Sci. Mar; 10(2) 227-237.

Ways to strengthen/ support or show appreciation for one of the support people in your life:

- Thank them
- Spend more time together
- Call/text/face time more
- Do something nice for them
- Write to them
- Tell them how you feel about them and why they are important to you



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

Make Your Connections Stronger!

Write a list of people who support you and one type of support you get from each of them.

Example 1: Co-worker - listens to me when I am stressed.

Example 2: Neighbour helps with shoveling.

Write how you support your list of people

Example 1: Friend – I help to get the kids on the bus in the morning.

Example 2: Neighbour - I bring over vegetables from my garden.

Write how you support your list of people.

Example 1: Father – I get groceries and run errands.

Example 2: My partner – Take on more responsibilities when they are away on a business trip.

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

Example 1: Father – I can visit or call him this week.

Example 2: Partner – I can plan some time together.

Activity 2: Reach Out to Make Connections

Goal

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

Messages

- It can be very hard to get out of the cycle of loneliness and isolation. Barriers such as fear, lack of transportation or health issues can keep us from reaching out to others.
- The more you connect with others and take part in your communities, the easier it is for other people to reach out as well.
- The more you connect with people the better you feel mentally and physically.

Time

- 10 minutes plus time to research (if technology is available during the session and depending on the size of the group)

Supplies

- Video: Building Social Connections
- Technology, for example: Wi-Fi, computer access, smart phones, if available
- Paper and pens

Facilitator Steps

1. Watch the video: Building Social Connections
2. Say to the participants: “We are going to look for activities or volunteer opportunities you can try that will help you make more connections”.
3. Say to the participants, “Using the technology available, find an agency, volunteer opportunity or club that seems interesting to you”.
4. Ask the participants if anyone wants to share what they found (optional).

Possible Participants’ Answers

1. 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.
2. Where can someone start looking:
 - 211 (community organization)
 - 311 (municipal activities)
 - School
 - Place of work
 - Community Association
 - Community Center
 - Community Resource/Community Health Centre
 - Volunteer Ottawa



There are people who can help get you started including your health care professional, your local community health or resource centre, a teacher at school, an elder in your community, a neighbour you know down the street, or a local service club.