

**When you have social connections with others, you reduce the impact of stress in your life.**

Have you ever noticed that resilient people rely on others to help them thrive during trying times? A sense of belonging contributes to a happy, healthy and rewarding life. Relationships with nurturing, safe and trusted people will build your resilience.

**Socially connected people tend to have:**

- Strong family ties
- A wide circle of friends
- Affiliation with religious/spiritual groups
- Experience as a volunteer
- Engagement in their communities

You may wonder – who has the time to do all that? You don't need a huge network to enjoy social support. The key is to nurture relationships with positive and compassionate people. These are the people in your life who accept your vulnerability when the going gets tough. Often great listeners, they respect your boundaries and share their truth. You can count on them. Relationships based on trust give you purpose and meaning, and amp up your happiness.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development has researched happiness for 85 years. Studies showed that people often assumed that wealth and fame were the keys to happiness. However, those who fared best were people who leaned into relationships with family, friends and community. Their social networks shaped their personal and professional lives.

Some people find it difficult to make and maintain these social connections. Sometimes social relationships are lost due to retirement, moving or the death of a loved one. That doesn't mean we can't find and form new relationships.

**How do we build relationships & make social connections? Pick one thing to do this week:**

- Reach out to a family member or friend you haven't spoken to in months or years
- Volunteer to meet with a senior citizen who has minimal social contact
- Say "I love you" instead of just rushing out the door to work or school in the morning
- Set up a date night with someone you care about
- Volunteer with other people to enrich your community
- Connect lonely youth to caring adults in the community
- Reach out to your neighbors, if only to stop and chat at a mailbox
- Take a vacation from electronic devices and look people in the eye
- Watch your self-talk and decrease negative comments
- Join a book club
- Consider joining a support group to meet others with similar challenges
- Take a class or join a new activity where you can interact with new people
- See if your library has community events
- Gather organizations together for a conversation about leveraging mental health resources in your community; share local stories of resilience.



# BOUNCE BACK™: SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

promoting health through happiness

## Some great tips

- Not everyone has one person to confide in. You can foster different relationships for various kinds of support.
- If you're there for others, they more than likely will be there for you. Use Random Acts of Kindness and Gratitude Letters to open doors.
- Digital devices help keep us in touch with people across the country. Many grandparents video chat with grandchildren on a regular basis. Remember that face-to-face communication is often the best!
- It takes time to nurture new relationships. They don't happen overnight.
- If you're anxious about interacting with others, consider talking with a therapist. Find someone with specialized social skills training.

## BENEFITS

Those more connected to family, friends and their communities are happier, healthier and live longer. Being socially active and having satisfying relationships can result in:

- Above average levels of happiness
- Lower levels of depression and anxiety
- Higher resiliency across stressful events and environments
- Lower blood pressure
- Better immune response
- Decreased levels of stress hormones
- Diminished pain
- Sharper memory

Isolation is not good for our health. At some time during their lifetime, 40 percent of people are lonely. Loneliness can get in the way of mental functioning, sleep and well-being.

A 2016 study showed that people who had greater levels of social support enjoyed better mental health. It also showed that negative social relationships were associated with poorer physical health.

People who were most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the happiest at age 80!