



SOCIAL CONNECTION

The People Project Practice #4

WHAT IS SOCIAL CONNECTION?

When researchers refer to the concept of **social connection**, they mean the feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that this is a core psychological need, essential to feeling satisfied with your life.

Connection registers in our brains much like physical pleasure.

We are wired to connect reach out to and interact with each other.

Decades of research suggest that the quality of our social ties might be the single biggest predictor of our well-being.

WHY PRACTICE SOCIAL CONNECTION?

People who are very happy tend to be highly social and have strong relationships. Although strong social connections alone can't *guarantee* happiness, it may be impossible to be very happy without them. ¹

Social Connections are good for our health. ²

Social interactions feel good: Socializing creates positive emotions. ³

Social connections in youth are key to later well-being. ⁴

Social connections can help us live longer. ⁵

On the flipside, social isolation and loneliness are bad for our health. ⁶

Life satisfaction increases when social strategies (more time with friends) are implemented versus individual strategies (lose weight, quit smoking). ⁷

MORE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

Strong Social Connections lead to:

- A 50% chance of more longevity
- Recovering from a disease faster
- Lower anxiety and depression
- Increased Self-esteem and greater empathy ¹

People low in social connection:

- Are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and even suicidal behaviors which tend to further increase their isolation. ^{2,3}
- Predicts vulnerability to disease and death beyond traditional risk factors such as smoking, blood pressure, and physical activity. ²

Loving-kindness Meditation
BRAVING Trust
Giving the Gift of Time
Becoming a Better Listener
Several Tips for Increased
Connection



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CONNECTION PRACTICES

Deceptively Simple Practices for
you to try.

BASIC CONNECTION PRACTICES

Maintain your current friendships and reconnect with friends with whom you've lost contact. More face-to-face time and less screen time!

Remember it is the quality of connections, not the quantity. Strengthen the relationships you value most.

Use social media with care: if you use Facebook as a destination to look at the lives of others, it increases loneliness. If you use it as a means to connect with others face-to-face, it is a beneficial tool.

Even though it can feel vulnerable, be your most authentic self with the people you care about and you will feel more understood

BASIC CONNECTION PRACTICES

Practice gratitude:

- not only does this increase our happiness, it makes us feel more connected to others.

Notice the people in your neighborhood ²

- Rather than rushing all the time, take time to briefly connect to the people you come into contact with daily.

When you're feeling lonely, recognize the people who have supported you

- You can do this as a journaling practice.¹ and write a list of people who have supported you in the past and how that made you feel.

Make a list of your 3 AM friends

- friends who could call you if they were feeling lonely and needed someone to talk to. Let them know that you are here for them.

CONNECTION PRACTICE: LOVING-KINDNESS (METTA)

In this practice, we will be cultivating lovingkindness, or Metta. Metta is a Sanskrit word that means love, compassion, friendliness, benevolence, friendship and good will. We all have within us a natural capacity for lovingkindness.

Loving-kindness practice is offering ourselves and others wishes for Metta and lovingkindness in our lives. It has been shown to increase feelings of connection and reduce feelings of isolation.

Here are sample phrases to use. Use 3-5 and adjust to suit your practice.

1. May I be happy.
2. May I have peace.
3. May I be safe from all harm
4. May I be well in mind and body
5. May I be free

LOVING-KINDNESS (METTA) HOW TO:

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and repeat short phrases a few times. Always begin with yourself! A full round of this practice can take 15-20 minutes, but start with shorter sessions and move up.
2. After you've offered yourself loving-kindness, direct it toward someone who you love, or who has helped you. (i.e. May JANE be happy, etc.)
3. Now, picture someone you feel neutral about and offer them loving-kindness.
4. Bring to mind someone who you don't like or with whom you struggle and offer them lovingkindness.
5. Finally offer every living thing Loving-kindness by repeating: "May all beings everywhere be happy..." and continue with the 3-5 phrases until you're done.

LOVING-KINDNESS AND CONNECTION

Doing a simple loving-kindness meditation can make us feel less isolated and more connected to those around us: one study showed that a SINGLE SEVEN MINUTE loving-kindness meditation made people feel more connected to and positive about both loved ones and total strangers, *and* more accepting of themselves. ¹

Compassion is contagious. If you observe a kind act it can bring about a warm fuzzy state called “elevation.” When you feel elevation you are more likely to go out and help others. ²

When we act fairly towards others, it can impact others to be more compassionate up to 3 degrees of separation. If you are compassionate, your family members, neighbors, and colleagues may be more compassionate. ^{3,4}

BRAVING TRUST (BRENÉ BROWN)

Trust is the foundation of connection

Trust is not an all or nothing concept – it is something that is built in small moments

Examine the BRAVING elements of trust (next slide) and ask yourself if you are trustworthy, and where you struggle with trust

Do you trust yourself? Is that affecting your ability to connect?

Great connections are made when we take time to build trust with others.

BRAVING TRUST (BRENÉ BROWN)

Boundaries: *You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's okay and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.*

Reliability: *You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.*

Accountability: *You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.*

Vault: *You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.*

Integrity: *You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.*

Nonjudgment: *I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.*

Generosity: *You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.*

PRACTICE: THE GIFT OF TIME

1. Think of a person who you care about
2. What might you be able to do for that person that requires nothing more than your time?
3. Plan a gift of time for this person and give it, whether it means doing something with them or something for them on your own. Don't rush while doing it, focus on the person.
4. If you did something for them on your own, don't tell them how much time you spent on it. Let the gift speak for itself.

People who gave time to people they care about reported greater happiness than a group that was assigned to journal their memories. ¹

PRACTICE : SMALL TALK WITH STRANGERS

We spend a lot of time surrounded by people, but we're in polite silence and solitude. Striking up a casual conversation can make you both feel happier and more connected.

Most people want connection, but be sensitive to the wishes of potential conversation partners who do not want to engage.

Studies have shown that people are more interested in connecting—and these kinds of conversations are more pleasant—than we expect them to be. In fact, talking to a stranger can be just as enjoyable as talking with a friend (and the strangers enjoy it, too).

Even if you're an introvert, getting a brief boost of social connection can be a positive experience—despite what your intuitions are telling you.

BE A BETTER LISTENER

One simple way to feel more connected to others, and for them to feel connected to you is to be a better listener. We often listen to respond, but good listening is listening to hear what is being said.

Capitalize on Positive Events:¹ Ask someone about something good that happened that day and listen actively:

- Make eye contact
- Smile
- Make positive comments, “That’s great!” or “You must be so excited!” as appropriate.
- This gets easier and more natural with practice.

Or just listen actively, but quietly without interjecting your opinion for a few minutes.

- No one needs to know you’re doing this but they will likely notice the difference

BOTTOM LINE: JUST CONNECT

There are an overwhelming amount to studies about the benefits of strong social connections.

Connections are fun and feel good, so try to cultivate more connection in your life.

There are too many resources to include in this brief PowerPoint presentation, but if you are interested in learning more there are several great resources:

- What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness:
https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
- The Secret to Living Longer may be your Social Life:
https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life
- A brief summary on research on loneliness and social connection by Julianne Holt-Lunstad:
<https://www.apa.org/members/content/holt-lunstad-loneliness-social-connections>