

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Social Connection Heals

In difficult times it is easy to let our social connections suffer. Letting these connections weaken can interfere with recovery from stress. What can we do to maintain healthy social relationships during stressful life passages?

First are the benefits. Maintaining healthy social connections has been shown to have several well-being benefits.

- It can increase the prospects of living a long life by up to 50%. Longevity studies like the Blue Zones Study indicate that social connections, especially those related to one's faith, can add up to 14 years to one's life span. Investing in family relationships and new and old friendships are life-giving and life-extending. On the other hand, low social connection is linked to obesity and high blood pressure.
- Healthy social connection has been shown in research from UCLA to improve immune response by improving gene expression in our DNA. Being social can keep you from getting as sick as often. Conversely, low social connection is linked to higher levels of inflammation at the cell level.
- Research from Stanford indicates that healthy social connections can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Conversely, lower social connection levels are correlated to higher susceptibility to anxiety, depression, anger, and socially adverse behaviors.

Now the tips on improving social connectedness to shed stress and improve well-being.

- Be proactive. Be a social initiator, a social entrepreneur.
 - Reach out to the right tribe of people with whom you can have healthy and mutual relationships. Invite, say yes, stop by, and check-in.
 - This also works with making new friends, so walk across the room, smile, say hello, and be prosocial, even with strangers.
- Follow your interests. What do you like to do socially? Initiate these events with your family and friends.
 - You know you like it, so why not go for it?
 - Examples: you like walking, so walk with friends; you like coffee, so get coffee with friends.
- Ask for help. If you are stuck, super-busy, or struggling, ask the right person for help. Getting help is a meaningful social connection. Be ready to help others, too.
 - What goes around, comes around, so you might start by helping others.
 - Think of those people who you know are helpful and make your list. Be careful to not "over ask."
- Stay in touch. Remember all those people you used to hang out with before everything went wild? Many of them will still want to connect.
 - Start with a check-in or an invitation, and stay in touch.
 - If a face-to-face connection is not an option, see the next tip.
- Use technology responsibly to connect. It is convenient, and with some planning, it can be life-giving.
 - Look through your old texts to remind who to connect with first.
 - Schedule connection time – while eating, doing laundry, or any time you can safely and effectively multitask.