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Friendship is fitness: How social connection improves your health

PEERSPACE

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Part One: Why Social Connection Matters.

The Human Need for Connection

Science from across disciplines has converged in recent years to demonstrate the massive importance of social connection for health and well-being across our lives. There is a reason why we are so deeply impacted by our connections with others: Humans evolved as fundamentally social creatures. We are simply wired to seek a sense of attachment to significant others and belonging with the social groups we are immersed in.¹ From absolute dependency on our caregivers in infancy and early childhood, to the support we offer one another across the ups and downs of adulthood, we are in constant reliance on our web of relationships to get our basic needs met and enjoy meaningful lives.

Along the lines of food, water, or shelter, social scientists view our connectedness with other human beings as an essential aspect of survival. Loneliness is an important signal that alerts us, not unlike hunger or thirst, to our need to seek out or maintain human connection. In fact, there is evidence that hunger and social isolation activate the same regions in our brains.² And just as we get the chance to satiate our hunger through a delicious meal from time to time, these necessary moments of connection with others provide a major source of positive feeling in day-to-day life.

Unfortunately this awareness has arisen alongside research showing a decline, at the population level, in American's social connectedness over the past two decades. [This was made explicit by a 2023 US Office of the Surgeon General advisory outlining evidence of a rise in Loneliness and Social Isolation in the American population.](#)³ So, with an understanding of both the benefits of maintaining a sense of social connectedness and the current high levels of disconnection in American society, many of us are turning an eye towards how we can promote connectedness for ourselves and our communities.

¹ Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497–529.

² Tomova, L., Wang, K. L., Thompson, T., Matthews, G. A., Takahashi, A., Tye, K. M., & Saxe, R. (2020). Acute social isolation evokes midbrain craving responses similar to hunger. *Nature Neuroscience*, 23, 1597–1605.

³ Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation: The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community [Internet].

Why Is Social Connection Being Discussed So Much Now?

Recent research has exposed how a chronic lack of social connection is related to striking health outcomes over a lifetime. Though loneliness is a normal emotion that all of us can expect to experience to varying degrees across our lives, when we are isolated or deeply lonely across many years our experience of disconnection takes a toll on our mental and even physical health. Studies by Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad and colleagues have parsed apart the extent to which social disconnection impacts our minds and bodies. **Their results grab headlines with findings that prolonged social disconnection is more of a health risk than smoking 15 cigarettes a day, physical inactivity, obesity, or air pollution.**⁴

How Does Social Connectedness Protect our Mental Health?

Social connection is intertwined with our psychological well-being, both in any moment and across time. Research shows, for example, that people experience a better mood when acting more outgoing⁵ and we are less stressed after performing acts of generosity.⁶ In the long run quality relationships have been shown to help buffer us from ongoing mental health struggles such as depression.⁷

Just as our social experiences impact us emotionally, our mental health can impede our social connections. For example, when struggling with depression or anxiety we are likely to be more sensitive to the possibility of being rejected, and are therefore potentially more likely to misperceive people as dismissive of us, or to be more hesitant to reach out to connect in the first place.⁸ The consequence of that is that we may begin to isolate and exacerbate these existing mental health struggles in a negative cycle.

⁴ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 10(2), 227-237.

⁵ Margolis, S., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2020). Experimental manipulation of extraverted and introverted behavior and its effects on well-being. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 149(4), 719-731.

⁶ Lazar, L., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2022). The benefits of giving: Effects of prosocial behavior on recovery from stress, (August 2021), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psyp.13954>

⁷ Wickramaratne, P. J., Yangchen, T., Lepow, L., Patra, B. G., Glicksburg, B., Talati, A., Adekkanattu, P., Ryu, E., Biernacka, J. M., Charney, A., Mann, J. J., Pathak, J., Olfson, M., & Weissman, M. M. (2022). Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review. *PloS one*, 17(10), e0275004.

⁸ Gao, S., Assink, M., Cipriani, A., & Lin, K. (2017). Associations between rejection sensitivity and mental health outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 57(April), 59-74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2017.08.007>

Why is Our Physical Health Impacted by Our Social Life?

Relationships impact our bodies, primarily through whether we are relaxing—at a physiological level—into those relationships or staying activated and mobilized by a sense of threat. Relationships in which we generally feel understood, accepted, and cared for are linked to better physical and mental health outcomes over time.⁹ These relationships help us to regulate our nervous systems and de-stress. Alternately, some relationships are very stressful, rife with tense interactions and potentially challenging thoughts and feelings that linger afterwards. If we have fraught relationships or feel generally disconnected around the people in our lives, our social life is more likely to be a trigger of prolonged stress.¹⁰ There are measurable biological implications to our experience of social stress or ease. **For example, research suggests that people experiencing quality close relationships have healthier levels of the stress hormone cortisol over time.**¹¹

When we are thriving in our social life, we also likely have more practical support for maintaining our physical health.¹² Rides to the doctor, assistance while recovering from an injury, a friend who makes plans to exercise with you, a partner that helps you stay accountable to eating well—these are just a few examples of the ways that people in a robust social network help us to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Why Are People Socially Disconnected Now?

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic called for the social distancing of 2020 and beyond, trends in American society showed declines in social connectedness. As far back as the 1990s sociological research showed declines in American community engagement.¹³ Then, across the first two decades of the 21st century, the average person's time spent engaging with friends dropped by 20 hours per month.¹⁴ People now report having less friends, and less trust in their communities. There are several

⁹ Pietromonaco, P. R., & Collins, N. L. (2017). Interpersonal Mechanisms Linking Close Relationships to Health. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 531–542.

¹⁰ Holt-Lunstad, J. (2021). The Major Health Implications of Social Connection. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(3), 251–259.

¹¹ Slatcher, R. B., Selcuk, E., & Ong, A. D. (2015). Perceived Partner Responsiveness Predicts Diurnal Cortisol Profiles 10 Years Later. *Psychological Science*, 26(7), 972–982.

¹² Pietromonaco, P. R., & Collins, N. L. (2017). Interpersonal Mechanisms Linking Close Relationships to Health. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 531–542.

¹³ Putnam, R. D. (2015). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *The city reader* (pp. 188–196). Routledge.

¹⁴ Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation: The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community.

theorized reasons for why this may be, and likely all of them play some role in these trends.

One often discussed culprit of our population's decreases in connectedness is the rise of smartphones, social media, and other technologies that easily capture and hold our attention, such that we simply engage less with the people in our lives. Greater use of social media is also related to greater perceptions of being socially isolated. Yet, while the screens that come up between ourselves and important others on a daily basis are highly visible, there are other potential causes that are less easy to see. Loneliness and social isolation are higher amongst marginalized populations:¹⁵ the oldest (more isolated) or youngest (more lonely) adults in our society, people who earn lower incomes, single parents or caregivers without support, or people with ongoing mental and physical health struggles. Thus declines in overall connection may be related to changes in the quality of social infrastructure that allows more people to stay engaged in community.

The Importance of Connectedness

Because a socially healthy society requires, at its core, people coming together, building connectedness is a nation-wide project. Yet to increase connectedness at a large scale requires countless collaborative creative efforts to bring those who are (or who feel) excluded into the social fold on the local as well, from within our own homes, to the organizations we work in, to those policies and programs that support and remove barriers to connection in our communities.

According to a 2025 PEW Research Report, about 16% of American adults feel lonely or isolated all or most of the time.¹⁶ While we should aspire as a society to reduce this number, it also highlights that most Americans are experiencing healthy social lives with only transient loneliness and isolation (keeping in mind that transient loneliness is a normal experience), and therefore can focus attention on maintaining social well-being and the quality of their existing relationships rather than needing to make drastic changes in how they connect. For you as an individual, this maintenance may be aided by building knowledge of the ways people reliably come to feel connected, and awareness of how you as an individual prefer to connect.

The following section highlights relevant research around what social connection is and how it occurs in the moment, followed by a list of small actions you can take to enhance the feeling of connectedness in your days.

¹⁵ Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation: The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community.

¹⁶ Pew Research Center (2025). Men, women and social connections. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2025/01/16/men-women-and-social-connections/>

Part Two: What is Social Connection?

What Exactly Is Social Connection?

Though we can all point to experiences of feeling connected with other people, it can be difficult to put words to exactly what social connection is. This is partially because a sense of positive connection with others arises differently for everyone. **According to social scientists, social connection is the subjective experience that we are getting enough—or even an abundance—of the unique kinds of engagement with other people that fulfill our personal social needs, in terms of the quantity, quality, and function¹⁷ of these connections.¹⁸**

When we pay attention to our social experiences, we'll notice that we feel more or less connected to other people in any momentary social interaction. We also tend to experience an overarching sense of social belonging in our lives in general. Some individuals might need a lot of a specific kind of interaction to feel satisfied socially in general—for example, deep and meaningful conversations—while others may be satisfied with less social engagement, or with social interactions of a different sort (more on this below).

Loneliness and Social Isolation

Loneliness arises when there is a discrepancy between our unique desires for social connection and the quantity and quality of our interactions with others.¹⁹ Loneliness is not the same as social isolation—many of us have had the experience of feeling lonely yet not being alone. We may be at a party with people that we do not feel fully accepted by, for example, or talking with someone with whom we feel misunderstood. Loneliness is a normal and useful emotional sensation that, like hunger or thirst, alerts us that we are not getting enough of something vital for our well-being. It is when loneliness becomes chronic that it can have measurable negative impacts on our health.

Social isolation occurs when we have few social interactions and a limited social network. This can be temporary, like when we move to a new city, or long-standing.

¹⁷ Holt-Lunstad, J. (2021). The Major Health Implications of Social Connection. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(3), 251-259.

¹⁸ Cacioppo, S., Grippo, A. J., London, S., Goossens, L., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2015). Loneliness: clinical import and interventions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(3), 238–249

¹⁹ Cacioppo, S., Grippo, A. J., London, S., Goossens, L., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2015). Loneliness: clinical import and interventions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(3), 238–249

Depending on their unique needs for connection and tolerance for solitude, people will vary in how lonely they feel when socially isolated.

To maintain our personal social well-being, it's important to consider not only the frequency of our social interactions or the size of our networks, but also the quality of our interactions and the extent to which they foster genuine connection.

Who Do We Benefit from Feeling Connected With?

The human brain has a limited capacity to hold and process all the information necessary for sustaining relationships, and in complex and busy societies we only have limited time to devote to maintaining our bonds. **Social scientist Robin Dunbar, and colleagues, have estimated that we are able to maintain around 150 relationships at any moment, and these relationships fall into several categories of closeness.**²⁰ Importantly, people in each of these categories likely serve a different function towards our overall social well-being:

- At the core of our social circle we have the capability of forming a network of intimate connections involving people who are central to our identity, like our romantic partner or our best friend. These are people with whom we can confide about our vulnerabilities, turn to in a crisis, and know that we would be at their side for their struggles and achievements as well. It is unlikely that we will have more than a handful of intimate connections at any time in life, but we are likely to devote a considerable amount of time and energy into these relationships.
- Humans are also able to maintain up to a few dozen people who we can rely on for regular companionship and support, our relational connections. These folks are friends and family that may not be the first that we call when we are grieving, but we certainly have them on the list for our birthday celebration or feel comfortable asking to borrow their truck when we move.
- Then there are those folks that populate the background of our social life, our collective connections. These are folks we might call acquaintances, friends-of-friends, neighbors, or co-workers, and who can provide a sense of belonging, and accessible, everyday support.

²⁰ Cacioppo, S., Grippo, A. J., London, S., Goossens, L., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2015). Loneliness: clinical import and interventions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(3), 238–249

- Of course, strangers are resources for connection too! For example, research shows that people typically underestimate how well-received they will be by initiating conversation with strangers, as well as how much satisfaction they will experience in that conversation²¹

The Benefits of Nurturing A Variety of Relationships.

For an overall sense of social well-being, research has shown that having a variety of relationships at each of the above levels—a diverse “social portfolio”—is important to mental health.²² Different kinds of relationships serve different purposes in our lives. Therefore, we benefit from connecting with both the people we are close to and acquaintances, strong and weak ties. For example, perhaps you can recall times when you’ve had lots of friends to do activities with (relational connections) but felt a lack of intimate connection (a common experience on college campuses, for example), or times when you felt intimately connected with a few people but longed for a larger social circle to spend time with (a common experience during the COVID19 pandemic).

How Does Social Connection Occur in the Moment?

Importantly, though, these ways of connection are not universal—what fosters connection in one moment may not do so in another, and what works for one individual might not work for someone else. Feeling connected relies on our unique perception of the interactions we have, and can be influenced by many factors, from our physical environment, to our mood, to our culture, to how our unique brain is wired to make sense of the world. For example, one person might interpret a surprise gift from their spouse as a random act of love, while another might interpret this gift with suspicion (“what did they do that they are feeling so guilty about?”), and indeed the same person’s interpretation might look different from one day to another! There is no one correct way to connect.

Deep and Meaningful: Emotional Intimacy

For many of us, when considering the concept of meaningful moments of social connection, images arise of deep conversations, where we open up about aspects of ourselves we would not share with just anyone—our emotions, values, beliefs, dreams, regrets—and we provide an ear for others to open up likewise.

²¹ Kardas, M., Kumar, A., & Epley, N. (2022). Overly shallow?: Miscalibrated expectations create a barrier to deeper conversation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 122(3), 367–398.

²² Collins, H. K., Hagerty, S. F., Quoidbach, J., Norton, M. I., & Brooks, A. W. (2022). Relational diversity in social portfolios predicts well-being. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(43), e2120668119.

This kind of social interaction, what social psychologists call moments of emotional intimacy,²³ is shown to be a key way that people come to feel deeply close to each other. When we share vulnerable thoughts and feelings and perceive that these “self-disclosures” are met with understanding, validation, and care (rather than tepidness, indifference, judgement, etc.) we gain trust in the person who has received us. And if we show others that we can receive and be trusted with their vulnerable information by listening with understanding and care, we tend to feel closer to them, being allowed to know who they are at a deeper level. High quality close relationships tend to be built on just these kinds of intimate interactions.

Giving and Receiving Support

One of the most widely studied ways that people connect is through acts of giving²⁴ and receiving²⁵ support. Social support can come in many forms, from giving someone a lift home to providing a shoulder for them to cry on. There are several categories of social support that are commonly acknowledged in research, including:

- Emotional Support: Showing up to help people process or regulate their emotions.
- Tangible Support: Offering practical assistance, such as bringing over a meal to a friend who is ill.
- Informational Support: Sharing knowledge or advice to assist others.

Whichever kind of support is present in a social interaction, people tend to feel connected when others show up for them in a way that demonstrates understanding and compassion for their unique situation and honors their own independence and ability to solve an issue as they see fit. We help those who support us to feel connected when we respond with sincere appreciation for the assistance they have given us. Expressions of gratitude, studies show, offer a relational glue.²⁶

²³ Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck, D. F. Hay, S. E. Hobfoll, W. Ickes, & B. M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions* (pp. 367–389). John Wiley & Sons.

²⁴ Inagaki, T. K., & Orehek, E. (2017). On the Benefits of Giving Social Support: When , Why , and How Support Providers Gain by Caring for Others. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(2), 109–113.

²⁵ Taylor, S. E. (2011). Social support: A review. In M. S. Friedman (Ed.), *The Handbook of Health Psychology* (pp. 189–214). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Algoe, S. B. (2012). Find, remind, and bind: The functions of gratitude in everyday relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(6), 455–469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2012.00439.x>

Importantly, social support is not just counted in how we show up for each other when the going gets tough. We also feel supported when people affirm or celebrate good things happening in our lives,²⁷ when they show interest and joy around our successes. It never hurts to offer a high five!

Coming Together in Enjoyable Activity

Bonding with others can often be exceedingly fun, and in fact, experiencing shared positive emotions²⁸ with others is a reliable way to experience moments of connection. For example, raising a glass together to toast your favorite team's win adds an extra jolt of happiness. Indeed, researchers have found that joining together in positive feeling truly amplifies each of our emotional experiences: seeing your joy reflect my joy actually lifts my emotional state to a more positive height: **a phenomenon called, "Positivity Resonance."**

Studies have looked at a number of typically enjoyable activities and found that shared participation promotes a sense of connection. For example, gathering to eating a shared meal,²⁹ or activities like walking,³⁰ exercising,³¹ singing,³² dancing,³³ or laughing³⁴ together. Key to these studies are findings

²⁷ Gable, S. L., & Reis, H. T. (2010). Good news! Capitalizing on positive events in an interpersonal context. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 42(10), 195-257.

²⁸ Brown, C. L., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2021). Characteristics and consequences of co-experienced positive affect: Understanding the origins of social skills, social bonds, and caring, healthy communities. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 39, 58-63.

²⁹ Dunbar, R.I.M. (2017). Breaking bread: the functions of social eating. *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology*. 3, 198-211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40750-017-0061-4>

³⁰ Wiltermuth, S. S., & Heath, C. (2009). Synchrony and Cooperation. *Psychological Science*, 20(1), 1-5.

³¹ Davis, A., Taylor, J., & Cohen, E. (2015). Social Bonds and Exercise: Evidence for a Reciprocal Relationship. *PLoS one*, 10(8), e0136705.

³² Pearce, E., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2015). The ice-breaker effect: Singing mediates fast social bonding. *Royal Society open science*, 2(10), 150221.

³³ Tarr, B., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2016). Silent disco: dancing in synchrony leads to elevated pain thresholds and social closeness. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 37(5), 343-349.

³⁴ Dunbar, R. I. M., Frangou, A., Grainger, F., & Pearce, E. (2021). Laughter influences social bonding but not prosocial generosity to friends and strangers. *PLoS One*, 16(8), e0256229.

that our bodies have the chance to sync up together in movement and feeling. Connection extends beyond the psychological, often emerging in the physical synchrony that happens when we laugh, sing, or dance together.

The Experience of Being Connected

As the above sections show, there are many ways to connect. But, what is going on under the surface? The following psychological experiences are commonly found in studies of social connection, regardless of the actions people are taking.

Common-ground:

Across various kinds of meaningful social interactions is a sense of common-ground, ranging from simply discussing our shared interests or identities to experiencing a sense of a shared reality or worldview.³⁵ This may be, in part, because it feels easier to connect with people with whom we have a similar culture and language, but across cultures there are always common human experiences. One amazing way to enjoy common-ground is through humor: when we both get a joke we show each other that we see an aspect of the world in the same way!

Emotional Uplift:

Though joining in positive emotions is a powerful means of connecting, connections don't always occur in moments of joy. Some of our most appreciated moments of connection may come when we are consoled in our deepest sadness. Yet even in these situations we do tend to experience an emotional uplift. Even if we do not totally feel better, our experience of emotions becomes more complex, with relief and gratitude entering into the mix. Importantly a feeling of safety and security is usually present in a moment of connection.³⁶ It is normal to feel some nerves when we socialize, but it is more difficult to feel connected when our nervous systems are in fight or flight mode—we simply are less likely to be outgoing and open.

³⁵ Rossignac-Milon, M., Bolger, N., Zee, K. S., Boothby, E. J., & Higgins, E. T. (2021). Merged minds: Generalized shared reality in dyadic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120(4), 882–911. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000266>

³⁶ Murray, S. L., & Pascuzzi, G. S. (2024). Pursuing Safety in Social Connection: A Flexibly Fluid Perspective on Risk Regulation in Relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 75(1), 379-404.

Mattering:

An increased sense that we matter often accompanies a moment of connection³⁷ and is present across positive relationships.³⁸ We feel valued by another person, or see that we add value to their life. Either way we personally feel affirmed in our worthiness by our meaningful interactions. Perhaps we see that someone has gone above and beyond what is expected of them to show up for us, or someone expresses their appreciation for the important role we play in their lives.

Connecting Online VS In-Person?

Research shows that we certainly can feel meaningfully connected to people when engaging online,³⁹ via video or phone calls, and even through texting and email. But when looking a little closer, research also shows that people tend to find in-person interactions more meaningful than the online alternative.⁴⁰

Researchers suggest that one reason in-person interactions feel distinct from online ones is the opportunities they provide cannot be replicated virtually. Physical touch is a clear example, and everyday gestures of warmth, like hugs or high fives, have been shown to foster a sense of closeness.⁴¹ There are also more subtle ways that we build and communicate a sense of connection with people when we are face-to-face. When we feel a sense of rapport with someone we are engaging with, we begin to synchronize our movements, sometimes without even noticing, moving into a dance that reinforces our sense of connection.⁴²

³⁷ Smallen, D. (2021). Experiences of meaningful connection in the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, 38(10), 2886-2905.

³⁸ Flett, G. L. (2022). An Introduction, Review, and Conceptual Analysis of Mattering as an Essential Construct and an Essential Way of Life. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 40(1), 3-36.

³⁹ Litt, E., Zhao, S., Kraut, R., & Burke, M. (2020). What are meaningful social interactions in today's media landscape? A cross-cultural survey. *Social Media + Society*, 6(3), 1-17.

⁴⁰ Roshanaei, M., Vaid, S. S., Courtney, A. L., Soh, S. J., Zaki, J., & Harari, G. M. (2024). Meaningful Peer Social Interactions and Momentary Well-Being in Context. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 15(8), 921-932.

⁴¹ Jolink, T. A., Chang, Y.-P., & Algoe, S. B. (2022). Perceived Partner Responsiveness Forecasts Behavioral Intimacy as Measured by Affectionate Touch. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 48(2), 203-221.

⁴² Ravreby, I., Shilat, Y., & Yeshurun, Y. (2022). Liking as a balance between synchronization, complexity and novelty. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 3181.

Strategically Planning and Not Planning for Meaningful Connection

Though moments of connection certainly often occur spontaneously, some research suggests that social events planned in advance may be more likely to produce meaningful interactions.⁴³

A caveat is important here, though, as events themselves likely benefit from some space for spontaneity! Unplanned time within a scheduled social event can allow for novel ways of interacting and chance connections. Meaningful connections are bolstered by at least some aspect of novelty.⁴⁴ When things are new and interesting, we stay engaged and remember them better! Events that break up the ordinary routines and scripts of our daily social life also potentially provide us with chance encounters that lead to new or deepening relationships.⁴⁵

⁴³ Litt, E., Zhao, S., Kraut, R., & Burke, M. (2020). What are meaningful social interactions in today's media landscape? A cross-cultural survey. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(3), 2056305120942888.

⁴⁴ Ravreby, I., Shilat, Y., & Yeshurun, Y. (2022). Liking as a balance between synchronization, complexity and novelty. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 3181.

⁴⁵ Goffman, A. (2019). Go to More Parties? Social Occasions as Home to Unexpected Turning Points in Life Trajectories. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 82(1), 51-74.

Small Actions for Boosting Connection

Knowing the importance of social connectedness for health and well-being, what can we do to maintain connectedness in our lives without adding weight to our already heavy to-do lists?

Pulling key elements from the above explainers, here is a simple cheat sheet of small ways you can ignite a sense of connection, for yourself and likely for those you engage with!

There is no one-size-fits-all way to connect, so these are just examples, but with some creativity many of the following can be forged into tools in your connection toolkit:

Supporting others breeds connection:

- Look for small random acts of kindness like door for the people walking behind you; Really savor when people express gratitude to you; or_____

Supporting others breeds connection:

- Look for small random acts of kindness like door for the people walking behind you; Really savor when people express gratitude to you; or _____

Synchronized bodies lead to connected minds:

- Tell your guitar playing friend to bring their acoustic for a group sing-along; have a dance party, even if just for five minutes in the kitchen; or _____

Sharing laughter matters:

- Watch a comedy that you and a your partner both find funny; prioritize friends who share your sense of humor, or _____

Consensual touch is fundamental to bonding:

- Maximize hello and goodbye hugs when you see people you care about; reach out to hold hands with your partner when you're walking together; or _____

Supporting others can mean celebrating their successes:

- Don't skimp on high fives for small victories; Make "I'm so excited for you" a common phrase in your vocabulary; Or _____

Expressing gratitude helps us feel closer:

- When saying thank you add in a bit of specificity as to just how someone assisted you; take a moment to share with someone close to you just how much you appreciate them in your life; or _____

Interactions with strangers tend to go better than we expect:

- Ask the barista how their day is going; Inquire about the book the person sitting beside you on the train is reading; or _____