

# Social Support

## What is social support?

Social support is having close relationships with other people. Support often comes from family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It means not feeling alone, "outside of things", or lonely. It is important for self-esteem. Social support also has many health benefits. It can help you:

- Be less likely to become depressed
- Cope better
- Lower your blood pressure
- Recover faster from illness or injury
- Stay more independent
- Live longer

There are different kinds of support:

- Emotional support and sharing life experiences
- Providing services or supplies for a person in need
- Giving advice, suggestions, and information to help someone solve problems

## How can you create social support in your life?

Start by looking at your current support network. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have someone you can call on if you are very upset?
- Do you have people with whom you do things just for fun?
- Do you have people who will care for you in practical ways such as giving you a ride or lending you money if you need it?
- Do you have people you talk to just to see how they are doing?

Make friendships and relationships an important part of your life. Make time for friends and reach out to other people. Don't be afraid to offer support or to ask for help when you need it. Everyone needs help and support sometimes.

- Join community organizations and attend local events and family get-togethers.
- Volunteer. Get involved in a cause that is important to you.
- Join a gym or start a walking group in your neighborhood.
- Take a course at your local college.
- Look online for "meet up" groups that will put you in contact with others who share similar interests or hobbies. Accept invitations, even if it feels awkward and difficult at first. Strike up conversations with strangers. You could be meeting a new friend. Smile, call people by name, ask them questions about themselves, look them in the eye, and remember things about them.

- Be a good listener. Talk about things that interest other people. Ask questions and clarify what someone means. Express interest in what others are doing. Do not be afraid to listen to others in distress and to let them know you care. Let others know you are there for them. Avoid giving advice. Just be there.
- Don't wait to be invited somewhere. Take the initiative and call someone. Rather than getting frustrated because your friends don't include you in their activities, you might say, "I miss spending time with you. Let's get together for dinner or a movie."
- Don't give up on existing relationships. Settle past differences and start with a clean slate. Answer phone calls and letters to make sure that you keep in touch.
- Look for people who make you feel accepted, peaceful, and energized, not pressured or tense.

## **What if it is hard to find social support?**

If you feel you cannot talk things through with friends or family members, find a support group. Support groups can help you understand that you are not alone and provide a safe place to share feelings. These groups give you a chance to talk to other people with the same type of problems.

Your support network may also include a mental health therapist or counselor who can help you feel heard and understood.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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