

# Working together for more good days



Having more good days isn't a solo mission. Check in with friends, colleagues, and loved ones to see how they're feeling, and offer support and encouragement. Connection is protection, and you don't have to carry the weight of "not-so-good" days alone. Even small moments of connection, whether in person or virtual, can reduce stress and anxiety, and remind us we're not the only ones feeling what we're feeling. When we look out for one another, more good days become possible for all of us.

## How to make friends as an adult

Comfort. Connection. Common ground. That's a good start to making adult friendships. The stakes seem higher when you're older, but that's because you have greater expectations. When you're young, you might just hang out with whoever is in your neighborhood or school. But when you grow up, friendships become more intentional and take a lot of work. The great thing about adult friendships is that they can be so rewarding. It's worth it to put your head and heart into it.

### Know Yourself

When you are in touch with yourself, you have a greater capacity to meet people. You also have more to offer others. With age comes more flexibility and adaptability, which helps with relationships. New phases in your life, such as starting a job, going to college, parenthood, etc. can change what you're looking for in a friend.

Self-love is the start of going out to make new friends. When you are filled up, you have much more to offer others. Reach out to others with your "feel good" energy. You might explore groups that interest you, such as outdoor activities, volunteering, classes, and support groups. Ask yourself what kind of time commitment you want to put into friendships. Decide whether you want deep relationships where you can bear your soul or if you want to keep it casual by enjoying activities together.

You may have friends for different reasons and seasons that fit in with your life. Certain times can be more challenging, like when you have children. Being single or suffering a recent loss can put you in a different space, so allow for that. Understand that relationships of all kinds can be messy and risky, but that meaningful connections are ultimately good for your well-being. Show your friends how much you support and appreciate them, and it will come back to you many times over.

### Be a friend to make a friend

Showing up and putting in the effort and time is the first step to making friends as an adult. It takes energy to build a relationship and it requires nurturing. Our first experiences with friendship are good learning opportunities. Whether you found it hard to make friends as a young person or not, adult relationships take a bit more finessing.

Past friendships can be good learning experiences. We might have insecurities that we need to address or overcome to be better friends in the future. Maybe we experienced or were guilty of creating one-sided friendships in the past. But now we understand that a true, meaningful friendship means both giving and taking—a back-and-forth between two people where they respect boundaries, choices, and each other.

From past friendships—and friendship break-ups—we learn that good friendships are built on good communication which fosters trust and honesty. Part of good communication is listening. Our friends need to feel safe and comfortable with us and vice versa. Feeling safe enough to be vulnerable will create a genuine emotional connection. Good communication also means showing up for and not “ghosting” our friends. Get on your friends’ calendars! This can look like meeting regularly in person, scheduling phone or video calls, checking in via text, etc.

Adult friendships need consistency and commitment. We have to make the effort, put in the energy, and take time to grow our friendships. In other words, we have to be a friend to make a friend. You will get what you put into it. That also goes for what qualities you need in a friend.

### **Identify your needs**

Remember that adult needs for a friendship can be different than in your younger days. Needs in later life change as you seek different kinds of connections. A quality friend provides joy, support, and encouragement in the good times and even in times of heartache and hardship. Searching your heart and thinking about what you need from a friend and what you have to offer them will be time well spent.

*Ask yourself, “What kinds of friendships work best for this time in my life?” How many friends would make me fulfilled and happy? Who are my people? Who is “safe?” “Do I need a ‘ride or die’ kind of friend?” Are work friends included as well as family friends? “Do I embrace the diversity within my circle of friends?”* Each friend brings unique gifts and perspectives and that should be celebrated.

Common ground builds a foundation for friendship. Your interests and passions point you to activities you enjoy doing. That can include just “hanging” with a companion and talking. You get to decide what you’re seeking in a friend and if that person makes you feel valued and loved. Identifying your needs is important in mature relationships and establishes expectations for those involved. Finding a good friend match makes life sweeter. It all starts with self-love and is key to going out and making new friends.

Adult friendships are one of the great joys in life. They’re worth the time you put into them when you consider the many benefits. They’re a great boost to your mental health and overall well-being. Having a friend who “has your back” makes you feel supported and “seen”. That’s what we’re all looking for: connection. Being able to share our lives with others allows us to live a happy and long life.

## How pets help ease loneliness and social isolation



We thrive when we are connected — connected with each other, connected with nature, and connected with animals. For those who struggle to connect with others or do not have access to green spaces, having an animal companion provides comfort, purpose, joy, and even a listening ear.

### **The impact of social isolation**

Connection is something that people seek to feel well mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. However, social isolation and loneliness are a growing public health concern in the United States.

Social isolation and loneliness do more than just disconnect people from others. Research shows that loneliness can increase your risk of several different mental and physical health conditions, including depression, heart disease, arthritis, and type 2 diabetes.

Did you know?

- People who lack social connections or report frequent feelings of loneliness tend to suffer higher rates of infection, death, depression, and cognitive decline.
- Children who are isolated or experience loneliness are more likely to have difficulty adjusting to school and exhibit problematic behaviors like disobeying rules and physical aggression, and an increase in internalized behaviors, such as fearfulness and social withdrawal.
- Adults who are more socially connected are healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers.

Human and animal interaction, such as pet ownership or interacting with animals in treatment, is a promising way to help slow the growing loneliness epidemic and improve social connection.

### **Animal connection reduces loneliness**

In a nationally representative survey, the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) and Mars Petcare found:

- 85% of respondents agree that interaction with pets can help reduce loneliness.
- 76% agree that human-pet interactions can help address social isolation.
- 72% believe human-animal interaction is good for their community.
- 80% of pet owners say their pet makes them feel less lonely.
- 54% of pet owners say their pet helps them connect with other people.

These stats show the power of human and animal interaction in improving loneliness and social isolation. People feel connected to and supported by their pets. This reduction in loneliness leads to better health benefits and satisfaction in life.

Pets become companions and confidants, and they can also help create connections with other people. This can look like finding and joining communities in person or online with other pet owners, meeting people in the park, at the vet, or at other events, and finding common interests by sharing or swapping stories about pets.

During his keynote address at the HABRI Summit on Social Isolation & Companion Animals, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, stated that pets teach us important lessons about love. With love comes taking risks to be compassionate, reaching out and helping others, and showing support.

“I think it’s important not just to think about benefits of pet ownership, but also to ask, how can we make interaction with pets more broadly, even if I don’t own pets, how can we make interaction with pets more feasible? I would love for my kids, for example, to be able to interact

with pets in school, in their community at large, and I think that the more people interact with pets, I think it softens them. It lowers our stress levels, and it allows us to connect in a way that I think is complementary to our connections with people.”

– Dr. Vivek Murthy, 19th Surgeon General of the United States

### **Animal companionship for people without pets**

If you don't have a pet, you might not be sure how to make animal companionship a part of your mental health routine. Don't worry! There are many places and spaces that you can find to fit your needs.

Here are some ways to access animals without owning one:

- **Find a provider that incorporates animals.** Many health care settings, like doctors' offices, hospitals, and other facilities, are incorporating human-animal interaction into their therapy and treatment plans.
- **Visit animal-centered places.** Farms, petting zoos, aviaries, and wildlife preserves and sanctuaries are some options to consider.
- **Volunteer.** You can volunteer at animal shelters, or offer to help a friend by pet-sitting or walking their dog when they work late or are out of town.
- **Work it into your hobbies and activities.** For example, you might try spending time at a cat café, hiking through a nature preserve, or signing up for a goat yoga class.

## Social Confidence and Connections



At some point, pretty much everyone struggles with feeling alone, insecure, or like they just don't fit in. Use this worksheet to think through what kind of connections are important to you and how you can make sure you have them in your life.



# SOCIAL CONFIDENCE AND CONNECTIONS



Let's face it: growing up is tough. At some point, pretty much everyone struggles with feeling alone, insecure, or like you just don't fit in. Use this worksheet to think through what kind of connections are important to you and how you can make sure you have them in your life.

## Exploring Current Connections

What are times you have felt connected? Were you with certain people, doing a certain activity, or in a certain location?

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What are some things you are proud of yourself for doing in the past to create a stronger sense of belonging?

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Are there friends, loved ones, or pets in your life who make you feel understood? What makes those relationships feel good?

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Connection looks different for everybody. What are some experiences or groups that made you feel like you belonged?

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## Exploring New Connections

Comparing your social life to others' can make you feel more alone or insecure. Let's try looking at this with a different lens.

Regardless of what you see in other's lives, what kind of social life do you want?

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What makes a quality friendship?

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How would you like to spend your time?

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When you look at your thoughts around feeling connected, do you notice any patterns? What are they?

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Are there opportunities to get connected, like a program at your school that you can get involved with?

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## Setting Goals

Think about how you described connection in the section above. Based on that, what is one goal you can set to make your social life feel better?

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What are three steps you can take to meet that goal?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Picture yourself in a year. What would future you look back and be proud of you for doing to create a stronger sense of belonging?

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It can be hard to know if your insecurities or troubles with friends are just a part of growing up or if they're signs of a mental health condition, like anxiety or depression.

If you're putting yourself out there and still feel disconnected from your peers or unhappy with your social life, take a mental health screen at [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org).

## Creating a Community Safety and Connection Plan



Having a sense of community creates a sense of support and belonging, which can support better mental health outcomes and reduce feelings of isolation. Connection to others may exist either in person, in virtual spaces, or through other means of communication.

# CREATING A COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CONNECTION PLAN



Having a sense of community creates a sense of support and belonging, which can support better mental health outcomes and reduce feelings of isolation. Connection to others may exist either in person, in virtual spaces, or through other means of communication. Use this worksheet to keep track of your current support network and make preventive plans for connection and safety.

**Did you know?**

Community safety is more than just physical. Psychological safety consists of inclusion and the safety to learn, contribute, and challenge the status quo.

## SAFETY

**WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST SAFE AND COMFORTABLE?**

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

**WHO CAN YOU REACH OUT TO IF YOU NEED HELP STAYING SAFE?**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

## CONNECTION

**WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST CONNECTED TO YOUR CULTURE?**

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

**WHO CAN YOU REACH OUT TO IN ORDER TO FEEL MORE CONNECTED WITH YOUR CULTURE?**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

## SUPPORT

**WHO MAKES UP YOUR CURRENT SUPPORT SYSTEM?**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

**WHO IN YOUR COMMUNITY CAN YOU REACH OUT TO FOR GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT OR WHEN YOU FEEL ISOLATED OR DISTANCED FROM OTHERS?**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT VIRTUAL SPACES CAN YOU ACCESS TO FEEL A STRONGER SENSE OF SAFETY AND CONNECTION?**

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