

Maintaining Strong Social Connections

You Should Know

During times of suffering, it can be a natural impulse to reach out to others for support. However, the quality of your social connections matter. The stronger your social connections—the people who know you well and will care for you during difficult times—the more resilient you will be when facing an emotional or physical crisis.

In its resilience report, the American Psychological Association wrote, “Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance, help bolster a person’s resilience.”

Additionally, strong social connections reduce loneliness while providing a sense of belonging. If you have superficial connections to a large number of people, you might still feel lonely. On the other hand, if you have a limited number of quality connections, you can be alone yet not experience loneliness.

What to Do

Identify the quality relationships in your life. When you think of your quality relationships, consider not only your romantic partner but also other important people in your life: family members, friends, coworkers, classmates, fellow members of worship centers, clubs, or groups, etc. These are people who are committed to you and the relationship you share; they are not just acquaintances.

Who are the quality relationships in your life?

How do they support you during challenging times?

Identify other sources of social connection. Social connections include professional relationships and community groups that are positive and supportive. Belonging to a professional or social group can increase your sense of value and belonging as you share common experiences, interests, or talents. Some examples include professional networking groups or an online book club. These groups can share helpful resources.

To what professional and social groups do you belong?

How do these groups or members help you cope during challenging times?

Identify sources of emotional support. A therapist, counselor, or support group can be effective in providing social and emotional connection during tough times. Social media support groups and virtual chats can also be a source of compassion, empathy, and nonjudgmental support, as members share experiences and stories of resilience.

Who are the emotional supports in your life?

How do they support you and provide resources during challenging times?

What can you do to build strong social connections?

Select one or two activities that you will try for the next two to three weeks to build strong social connections and increase your coping skills. Complete the following chart, tracking the level of social support and coping skills you experience before and after your activities.

Rate your levels on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = I feel totally unsupported, stressed out, and lonely, and 10 = I feel supported, experience a strong sense of belonging, and am able to cope. Add notes about your experiences.

Level of social support before (1-10)	Activity	Level of social support after (1-10)	Notes

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this exercise, did you feel a stronger sense of belonging and experience an easier time coping with challenges? Describe your experience:

What are some other ways you can improve your connections?
