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Strategies for improving your social health

Stay connected...



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Social connections might help protect health and lengthen life. Scientists are finding that our links to others can have powerful effects on our health.

Whether with family, friends, neighbours, romantic partners, or others, social connections can influence our biology and well-being. Look for ways to get involved with others.

Suggestions to find new social connections



- To find new social connections:
- Join a group focused on a favourite hobby, such as reading, hiking, painting, or wood carving.
- Learn something new. Take a cooking, writing, art, music, or computer class.
- Take a class in yoga, tai chi, or another new physical activity.
- Join a choral group, theatre troupe, band, or orchestra.
- Help with gardening at a community garden or park.
- Volunteer at a school, library, hospital, or place of worship.
- Participate in neighbourhood events, like a park clean-up through your local recreation center or community association.
- Join a local community group or find other ways to get involved in things you care about.
- Travel to different places and meet new people.

Take care of yourself while caring for others



Many of us will end up becoming a caregiver at some point in our lives. The stress and strain of caregiving can take a toll on your health. It's important to find ways to care for your health while caring for others.

Depending on your circumstances, some self-care strategies may be more difficult to carry out than others. Choose ones that work for you.

Suggestions to take care of yourself while caring for others:



- **Ask for help.** Make a list of ways others can help. For instance, someone might sit with the person while you do errands.
- **Get organized.** Make to-do lists, and set a daily routine.
- **Try to take breaks each day.** Finding respite care can help you create time for yourself or to spend with friends.
- **Keep up with your hobbies and interests** when you can.
- **Join a caregiver's support group.** Meeting other caregivers may give you a chance to exchange stories and ideas.
- **Eat healthy foods, and exercise as often as you can.**
- **Build your skills.** Some hospitals offer classes on how to care for someone with an injury or illness. To find these classes, ask your doctor or [contact your local Area Agency on Aging\(link is external\)](#).



Where you live, work, or go to school can have a big impact on how much you move and even how much you weigh.

Being active with others in your community can have a positive effect on your health habits and create opportunities to connect. You can help your community create ways to encourage more physical activity.



- Start a walking group with friends, neighbours, or co-workers.
- Make the streets safer for walking by driving the speed limit and yielding to people who walk.
- Consider joining a low- or no-cost exercise group or an office sports team such as softball or kickball, and enrol kids in community sports teams or lessons.
- Participate in local planning efforts to develop walking paths, sidewalks, and bike paths.
- Work with parents and schools to encourage kids to safely walk or ride bikes to school.
- Join other parents to ask for more physical activity at school.
- Try different activities to find the ones you really enjoy, and have fun while being active!



Many things can influence a child, including friends, teachers, and the things they see when they sit in front of the TV or computer. If you're a parent, know that your everyday behaviour plays a big part in shaping your child's behaviour, too.

With your help, kids can learn to develop healthy eating and physical activity habits that last throughout their lives.

Suggestions to help kids form healthy habits:



- **Be a role model.** Eat healthy family meals together. Walk or ride bikes instead of watching TV or surfing the Web.
- **Make healthy choices easy.** Put nutritious food where it's easy to see. Keep balls and other sports gear handy.
- **Focus on fun.** Play in the park, or walk through the zoo or on a nature trail. Cook a healthy meal together.
- **Limit screen time.** Don't put a TV in your child's bedroom. Avoid snacks and meals in front of the TV.
- **Check with caregivers or schools.** Make sure they offer healthy foods, active playtime, and limited TV or video games.
- **Change a little at a time.** If you drink whole milk, switch to 2% milk for a while, then try even lower fat milks. If you drive everywhere, try walking to a nearby friend's house, then later try walking a little farther.



Parents have an important job. Raising kids is both rewarding and challenging. Being sensitive, responsive, consistent, and available to your kids can help you build positive, healthy relationships with them.

The strong emotional bonds that result help children learn how to manage their own feelings and behaviours and develop self-confidence.

Children with strong connections to their caregivers are more likely to be able to cope with life's challenges.

Suggestions to build strong relationships with your kids:



- Catch kids showing good behavior and offer specific praise.
- Give children meaningful jobs at home and positive recognition afterward. Help them improve their skills one step at a time.
- Use kind words, tones, and gestures when giving instructions or making requests.
- Spend some time every day in warm, positive, loving interaction with your kids. Look for opportunities to spend time as a family, like taking after-dinner walks or reading books together.
- Brainstorm solutions to problems at home or school together.
- Set rules for yourself for mobile device use and other distractions. For instance, check your phone after your child goes to bed.
- Ask about your child's concerns, worries, goals, and ideas.
- Participate in activities that your child enjoys. Help out with and attend their events, games, activities, and performances.



Strong, healthy relationships are important throughout your life. They can impact your mental and physical well-being. As a child you learn the social skills you need to form and maintain relationships with others.

But at any age you can learn ways to improve your relationships. It's important to know what a healthy relationship looks like and how to keep your connections supportive.



- Share your feelings honestly.
- Ask for what you need from others.
- Listen to others without judgement or blame. Be caring and empathetic.
- Disagree with others respectfully. Conflicts should not turn into personal attacks.
- Avoid being overly critical, angry outbursts, and violent behavior.
- Expect others to treat you with respect and honesty in return.
- Compromise. Try to come to agreements that work for everyone.
- Protect yourself from violent and abusive people. Set boundaries with others. Decide what you are and aren't willing to do. It's okay to say no.
- Learn the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive ways of relating to others. Visit www.thehotline.org/healthy-relationships/relationship-spectrum(link is external).

Want to learn more?



- NIH scientists study how your family, relationships, and communities impact your health and well-being.
- Read more resources from the NIH institutes advancing research in these areas.