

How to Grow Your Support System

What is Social Support?

A social support system is the help and/or resources you receive from others. Social support can come from individual people such as family members or friends, groups of people, such as faith-based groups or support groups, or other resources in your community. Social support comes in different forms and can have a positive impact on your well-being, improve physical health, improve your ability to handle stress and provide an overall greater sense of security and safety.

Types of Support

There are different types of support you may receive from your social support network and all are valuable to your well-being. These include emotional, tangible, informational and social needs support.

- **Emotional Support:** Emotional support can include helping you manage difficult emotions, listening to your problems, validating feelings and showing sympathy/empathy.
- **Tangible Support:** Tangible support includes support with practical problems, such as offering financial assistance, rides to work and childcare.
- **Informational Support:** Informational support includes providing information that can help solve a problem or challenge.
- **Social Needs:** Social support helps fulfill basic social needs, such as providing feelings of belonging, connecting and love.

How can Support benefit me?

No one should have to deal with their problems alone if avoidable. Support from others can help you better process what you are going through and feel more prepared to handle life's challenges. Below are some of the benefits of having social support:

- Improved mental well-being
- Improved physical health
- Greater life satisfaction
- Ability to manage stress better
- Improved self-esteem
- Greater feeling of security

How can you build your social support system?

Below are some suggestions to build and utilize your support network:

- **Identify the different areas of support you need** (e.g. emotional support, tangible support, activities and pleasant events etc.).
- **Think about who would be appropriate to fit in each need category** from the people you have around you.
- **Make a list of family, friends, neighbors and other supports** you can reach out to when needed in each category. Write down their names and the ways you contact them.
- **Reach out to support systems outside of times when you need them.** Keep these relationships established within your means and capability. If you are able to offer support to others when able, that can facilitate a strong give-and-take of support in your network.
- **Find ways to get involved in your community.** This can include volunteering, hobbies, support groups or faith-based communities. This can expand your support network, reduce feelings of loneliness /isolation and improve your mood through social engagement.
- **Join support groups to connect with others** who have similar problems or issues (in-person or online).
- **Speak with a therapist** and use professional support as needed.

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