

Tips for Establishing Healthy Community

Abish Israde, CMHP | *Wedgwood Wraparound Program Supervisor*

Social connections are at the root of building healthy communities. Our relationships and interactions with family, friends, coworkers, and community members are just some of what can help us create positive social interactions. Other factors such as our schools, workplaces, and digital environments further impact how we interact with our communities. However, far too many people from all socio-economic backgrounds have reported feeling isolated, invisible, insignificant, and lonely. The 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory report states that lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. So how can we combat this at the individual level? Healing is in plain sight and we can begin by starting where we are, using what we have, and doing what we can.

The following are recommendations compiled from the 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory report on the healing effects of social connection and community

- **Invest time in nurturing your relationships** through consistent, frequent, and high-quality engagement with others. Take time each day to reach out to a friend or family member. Follow through with the missed calls or texts
- **Minimize distraction during conversation** to increase the quality of the time you spend with others. For instance, don't check your phone during meals with friends, important conversations, and family time.
- **Be responsive, supportive, and practice gratitude.** As we practice these behaviors, others are more likely to reciprocate, strengthening our social bonds, improving relationship satisfaction, and building social capital.
- **Participate in social and community groups** such as fitness, religious, hobby, professional, and community service organizations to foster a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose.
- **Reflect the core values of connection** in how you approach others in conversation and through the actions you take. Key questions to ask yourself when considering your interactions with others include:
 - How might kindness change this situation?
 - What would it look like to treat others with respect?
 - How can I be of service?
 - How can I reflect my concern for and commitment to others?
- **Seek help during times of struggle** with loneliness or isolation by reaching out to a family member, friend, counselor, health care provider, or the 988 crisis line.

For Caregivers:

- **Model healthy social connection** including constructive conflict resolution, spending time together, staying in regular contact with extended family, friends, and neighbors, setting time aside for socializing away from technology or social media, and participating in community events.
- **Invest in your relationship with your child or loved one** by recognizing that strong, secure attachments are protective and a good foundation for other healthy relationships.
- **Help children and adolescents develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with supportive adults** like grandparents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and mentors.
- **Encourage healthy social connection with peers** by supporting individual friendships, as well as participation in structured activities such as volunteering, sports, community activities, and mentorship programs.
- **Be attentive to how young people spend their time online.** Delay the age at which children join social media platforms and monitor and decrease screen time in favor of positive, in-person, connection building activities. The goal being to reduce excessive or harmful social media use
- **Talk to your children about social connection regularly** to understand if they are struggling with loneliness or isolation, to destigmatize talking about these feelings, and to create space for children to share their perspective and needs. Connect youth with chosen professionals to further expand on these concerns