



Your Personal
Recovery Journey

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Connectedness



Welcome back.

Review of today's topic:



Connectedness

- What does connectedness mean?
- Why is it important in my recovery?
- What can I do to create and maintain my social connections?

Review: Participation Guidelines

Review: What should I do if something triggers me during this module?

We encourage everyone to honor their own needs as they participate in this program. If at any point you feel triggered, overwhelmed, or just in need of a moment to care for yourself, please feel free to step out, take a breath, or use any self-care methods that work for you. Returning to the group is always welcome and there is no pressure to explain. Our priority is creating a safe and supportive space for each of us. Please also let the facilitator know if you need any additional support.

So, let's get started!



What is connectedness?

Having social connections is important to most people. In fact, it has been described as a “fundamental need” that people have. But what do we mean by the word connectedness?

There are several types of connectedness. For example, self-connectedness is about the process of being in touch with and connecting with ourselves. Spiritual connectedness speaks to the connection we may feel to a higher power. In this module, we will focus on social connectedness which has been described as “a state of feeling close (or “connected”) to another person or other people”.¹

Examples of social connections can include friends, family members, or people in our community. It can also include the helpers in our lives such as peer support workers or health care practitioners.


Many of us will experience various styles and levels of meaningfulness in relationships at different stages in our lives...from acquaintances to friends to family to supporters. It is your choice who you let into your life. Your social wants and needs are unique to you! But the important thing is to keep connections with others within reach.

1. O'Rourke, H. M., & Sidani, S. (2017). Definition, determinants, and outcomes of social connectedness for older adults: A scoping review. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 43(7), 43–52.
2. Haslam, C., Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., & Jetten, J. (2015). Social connectedness and health. *Encyclopaedia of Geropsychology*, 2015, 46–1.

For most people, it is not enough to simply have a number of connections with others: the quality or depth of the connection is important as well. Most people want to have some meaningful connections and ones that enable them to have a sense of “belonging”.² This sense of belonging can have many physical and mental health benefits and can help us find meaning in our recovery.

In-person get togethers, phone calls, and various social media technologies (video calls, texting, etc.) are all ways that can help us to stay connected to others.

As human beings, we all need or want some time to ourselves, too. Time alone allows us to reflect on things and explore independent hobbies, thoughts, and ideas. But finding a balance between being independent persons and being persons who can create and maintain relationships can be good for our mental health and physical health.³



2. Connectedness in Recovery Narratives of Persons Labeled Not Criminally Responsible. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*/2021, Vol. 20 No. 3 303–316
3. The Recovery College (Greenwich)/Bridge 86 Ltd 2020. CHIME Workbooks
www.therecoveryplace.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/1.-Connectedness-Workbook.pdf

EXERCISE

What does connectedness look like or feel like?

Let's reflect on this art work and write down some of our thoughts on the next page.



Artwork Title: **Connectedness**
Artist: **Nigel Bart**

EXERCISE

What does connectedness look like or feel like?

Let's talk about this piece of art... What kinds of connections do you see in this artwork? What does it **feel** like when you have a connection to someone? Or if you don't feel a connection to someone right now, what do you **imagine** or **remember** that feeling of connection to other people feels like?

A note about social inclusion.



Social inclusion is tied to social connection and belonging. It is about “creating the opportunity for everyone to learn, earn, be welcomed and engaged in their community and be heard. It is closely related to equality and fairness.”⁴

To have a socially inclusive society is to “make sure that all individuals are able to access work, services and community”, and that everyone has the connections to support with “a personal crisis or have their voices heard.” It is about being respected and valued and makes sure that the right conditions are provided for all to live with dignity.⁵

People with mental illness, including those who are homeless, are disproportionately socially excluded or isolated. Furthermore, because stigma exists in our society, at times things such as “race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation” and other identity related aspects of people “can lead to exclusion from a range of opportunities”.⁶

While there is much that communities and organizations need to do to reduce barriers and inequality for people experiencing mental illness and promote greater social inclusion, on a personal level, perhaps we can take some time to think about how we can build meaningful connections with others ourselves.

4. www.cubegroup.com.au/why-connectedness-and-inclusion-matters/

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Why is creating and maintaining connection important in my recovery?



Sometimes our experiences with mental illness may make us feel a loss of social connection and socially excluded, as we have stated above. This can happen for many reasons:

- Perhaps we prefer to stay to ourselves because of the signs and symptoms we are experiencing; perhaps we have social anxiety.
- Limitations, such as transportation, financial circumstances, or lack of access to internet/phone/computer can prevent us from being able to be a part of a group.
- Perhaps we don't have the energy to put into initiating contact or responding to contact made – it might feel overwhelming; or perhaps the stigma of mental illness, including self-stigma, impacts the relationships with people we were once close to or from getting to know new people.
- Maybe at certain points we just don't want to feel connected.

Whatever the reasons, it can feel comfortable or easier just to be alone and it may feel difficult to even imagine venturing out to make and maintain connections with people.

Although connecting socially can feel like it adds pressure and anxiety, social connections are so important to our mental health and physical health. Being connected to others and having a sense of belonging protects us from serious illness such as heart disease, stroke and dementia. It can also help us manage anxiety, depression, and stress, and it can even help us to live longer!

7. Centre for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/social-connectedness/about/index.html)

6. National Alliance on Mental Illness, The Importance of Social Connections for People with SMI, Max E. Guttman, LCSW, August 24, 2022

It is well documented that people with mental illness can be at increased risk of loneliness. Having social interactions with others can help balance us; “help (us) to feel grounded and connected to others; and allows (us) to be more engaged in our recovery journeys”.

Being a part of a community, however that community is defined by you, can also give you a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging. There are several types of “community” such as peer groups, volunteer opportunities, spiritual groups, cultural groups, hobby interest groups, or simply our neighborhood.

Regardless of how we define our communities, they can help us to feel like we are part of something bigger and can help us if we feel lonely.

We all have something to give within our communities – whether it is an idea, a listening ear, taking on a helpful task, or simply brightening someone’s day with a smile or another act of kindness. We can contribute to our communities in these ways and we can feel good about ourselves too!

Being within reach of connections is also important if you feel in crisis or are experiencing a relapse or a setback in recovery. We want people who we trust that will help us, that support us, that advocate for us, and that can make decisions for us in times when we may be unable to do so for ourselves (for example those we name in our safety plan or in our crisis plan).

Our healthy connections with other people and their connection to us makes us stronger. The support we get and give makes a difference to us in good times and in bad times.

Let's watch a video about connectedness.



Video to be played by your facilitator during the module.



VIDEO

Created by: Uplift (Love in Action)

Video link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC2Na1E3iVg

EXERCISE

Reflecting on your connections.

Who are your "people" and how connected are you?
And what do they provide in your recovery?

Having connections can look different for everyone. Making a diagram of our connections can help us to see and understand who our social connections are and what role they play in our lives. It also helps us to take responsibility for nurturing those relationships to maintain them.

Who are you connected to and what do they provide in your recovery? Let's write down our connections and the roles they play in our lives, and plot these connections in the circle map on the next page.

My Connections:



EXERCISE

Reflecting on your connections.

Once you draw your connections, you can reflect on these questions:⁹

Who listens to you when you need someone to talk to?

With whom do you share good news and bad news?

When you need advice, who do you go to?

When you have a problem, who do you turn to?

9. The Recovery College (Greenwich)/Bridge 86 Ltd 2020. CHIME Workbooks.
www.therecoveryplace.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/1.-Connectedness-Workbook.pdf

How do we strengthen our social connections?



It may be hard to know what to do to strengthen and/or reestablish our social connections, and to make new connections. But by putting out positive energy and staying encouraged, we can feel good about ourselves and the gains we are making toward our recovery as we are doing our part and making efforts toward the positive.

Here are a few ideas, shared by others, to help you on your way:¹⁰

- Saying hello to the cashier at the supermarket or giving a wave or smile to introduce yourself to your neighbor when you see them can receive a smile or conversation in return.
- Sometimes reaching out to the people that care about you needs coordination even with your own schedule. Planning or making the time to call or video call people that care about you, and working with their schedules, might surprise you.
- Even a short conversation can spark a connection. Are there any new people in your life that you could start up a conversation with? Are there any old friends who you haven't been in touch with that you might want to reconnect with? Reaching out, either in person or over social media, might be that spark.
- Are you comfortable reaching out to a family member to connect? Could it be that just a suggestion of something that you both like to do could become a surprise starting point. Something simple like having a coffee together or going for a walk together could be just that.
- Communities and environments that offer supportive connections can be a good place to start building your network as well. For example, places of worship, our schools or workplaces, mutual support groups, or various types of neighborhood centers where we can feel safe to explore connections in our community are important.

10. Some ideas in this list were inspired by the Canadian Mental Health Association www.cmha.ca/brochure/social-support/

- Peer support communities give the opportunities to connect with people who experienced similar things to us and that can be especially helpful to us in our recovery.
- A sense of connectedness can also be fostered through positive healing relationships with health professionals. If you have a health care professional that you trust, this person can become an important part of your network. Be sure to ask for help when you need it!
- When you feel ready, you may want to try joining in a group activity. This can be an activity that you used to do or something completely new that you have wanted to try.
- Volunteering for something that you care about is a great opportunity to try out new roles and to give back. It can make us feel good to help others and can sometimes move our focus to something other than our illness.
- Focus on gratitude. Feeling grateful for even small things, like having a good support system, can help us to focus on the positive things in our life.

It is important to recognize, and at times expect, that we will get positive responses when we take action to initiate or reestablish social connections in our lives, and sometimes we may not.

Some connections that we have may change over time and that is okay! As well, some connections in our life may not be healthy for us. As we learn more about ourselves and empower ourselves, we can often recognize which relationships and connections are not nurturing our well-being, and we can learn to set boundaries about who we let into our lives.

Let's watch a personal recovery story video about connectedness.



Video to be played by your facilitator during the module.



VIDEO

Created by: Schizophrenia Society of Canada, ColCon Productions

Video link: player.vimeo.com/video/1063647467

Discussion: Share thoughts about the video if you wish. For example, how did hearing Nigel's story about the importance of social connections in his recovery make you feel? Were you inspired or did you resonate with Nigel's story? In what way? How does this video fit with your experience of making connections?

EXERCISE

What can I do to strengthen my social connections?

Think about and write down one thing you want to do to initiate a new connection in your life.

If you can reflect on a connection you used to have that was positive, how could you reestablish this previous relationship?

Write down a statement that you have heard or make up one of your own to inspire you to continue to strengthen your social connections.

If someone approached you with an interest in rebuilding a connection, how would that make you feel?

Wrap up and “what did I get from this module?”



Closing reflections and outstanding questions.

Consider taking some time to review your social connection diagram and reflect on ways to continue to strengthen your connections in meaningful ways. Set one attainable goal for yourself that you want to work toward to strengthen your social connections. What are some ways that you can visually remind yourself that you are not alone; that you have or can make connections?

Additional reflections you can do at home.

If you have access to photos on your phone or elsewhere (e.g. in a magazine, etc.), find a photo that connects you to someone or something. Hang it somewhere.



See below for additional resources and support:



Social Connectedness 101: The Many Pathways to Social Connection

In the first installment of this Social Connectedness 101 series, we defined “social connectedness” and introduced its importance for our health and well-being.

VISIT WEBSITE



These resources can be accessed electronically through the online participant workbooks available at your yourpersonalrecoveryjourney.ca

Thank you for participating in this module.

Please fill in an evaluation at the end of each module!

Your facilitator will provide you with an evaluation form at the end of each module, or send one to you electronically following each module.

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The Schizophrenia Society of Canada would also like to acknowledge the important work of the Recovery Research Team in developing the CHIME Framework, on which this program is based. Special thanks to Dr. Mike Slade for his expertise and passion which has guided us all in the vision of recovery in significant and meaningful ways. (<https://www.researchintorecovery.com>), first published in: Leamy M, Bird V, Le Boutillier C, Williams J, Slade M (2011) Conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health: systematic review and narrative synthesis, British Journal of Psychiatry, 199, 445–452.