



Building Closer Bonds

To Get (and Give) The Support We Need



theThriveCenter.org



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Introduction

“Science from all fields is telling us very clearly that we are not only social animals, but animals who need a special kind of close connection with others, and we deny this at our own peril...Having close ties with others is vital to every aspect of our health – mental, emotional, and physical.”

- Dr. Sue Johnson

Relationships are what we are made for. Even if you have good relationships, there are many benefits from working on them and deepening them. The Harvard Study of Adult Development found close positive relationships are the biggest predictor of long-term health and happiness. Even in regard to our spiritual health, it is through relationships with one another, that we grow in our faith, and learn about ourselves, and live out our deepest beliefs and values.

Research is clear—the deep and nurturing relationships that develop within religious and spiritual contexts predict physical and mental health benefits. Rich networks of relational support from friends, family, work and church can be cultivated in meaningful ways. Healthy spiritual and religious communities provide emotional support and a deep knowing that we are loved and lovable. One of the most important aspects of community involvement is accountability. Who will tell you the truth when you are making questionable decisions? Who will notice when you don’t show up for an event?

This following set of practices point to psychologically backed ideas to foster relationships, develop capacities for intimacy and find healthy communities of practice.

While good relationships don’t alleviate all of life’s challenges, they do provide companionship and support for the journey. Visit <https://thethrivecenter.org/facets/relationships-community/> for more resources.

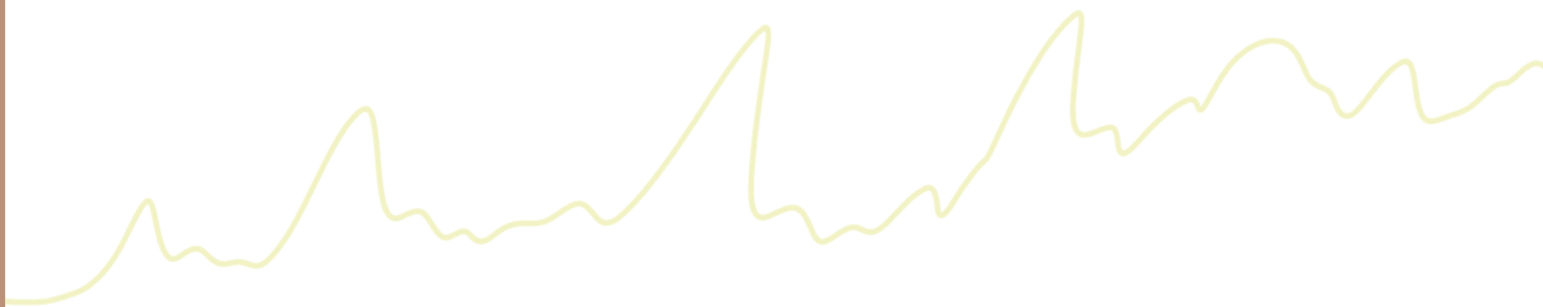




Editing and Deepening Your Friendship Group

By The Thrive Center

(based upon the work of Dr. Pam King)



Think about your innermost circle of friends. Do you have at least 3-5 people who have your back? According to anthropologist Robin Dunbar, people have an intimate “relational capacity” of five. Consequently, being a “good” friend to others and to yourself might require some intentional “editing” of your inner circle. This does not mean that you eliminate or cancel them, but are mindful about how you spend your time. Recognizing your inner circle can enable you to be more intentional about how you spend your relational time and energy. Do you need to make adjustments to edit some people out, and include other people inside your inner circle?

- Do you feel joyful in your friends' presence?
- Are you able to be vulnerable?
- Who notices when things aren't going well for you?
- Who holds you accountable when you make mistakes or don't show up?
- Who do you admire and want to develop alongside?





If you don't have an inner circle of people, here are some places to start.

- Think about your day-to-day or weekly life patterns. Is there anyone you naturally cross paths with that, with some intentionality, could offer a caring, reciprocal friendship? Write down their name(s).
- Are there small moments of flexibility in your schedule that could be connection points (grabbing coffee, a chat while walking your dog, even texting a funny meme or about a common interest that might grow a friendship)? Reach out to them.

Outside of direct friendships, is there a faith community you would consider joining? Perhaps something in the radius of your life. Try using an app such as Church Finder or Palmly or search local church websites to explore whether they provide programs that meet your needs.

From Created for Community and The Friendship Edit

For more information see Spend time with people






Unpacking the Hurt to Forgive

By The Thrive Center

(adapted from the work of Dr. Sue Johnson)



Feelings like resentment or a desire for revenge can keep our bodies stuck in fight-or-flight mode. This creates a cycle of stress (and negativity) that blocks us from finding peace, connecting with others, or living in line with our deeper purpose. Forgiveness helps shift us into a more open and peaceful state of mind—one that's essential for both well-being and spiritual growth.

Dr. Sue Johnson in her book, *Hold Me Tight*, offers the following:

Before you engage with this practice, understand that forgiveness is...

1. Sharing honestly with the other person how you feel
2. For the sake of the person doing the forgiving
3. Practicing letting go of the energy it takes to be resentful or vengeful towards another person
4. Learning to feel anger and then practicing letting it go
5. Working on making peace with the life you have





Unpacking the Hurt to Forgive Questions

Directions: If you are ready to practice forgiveness, you might want a pen and paper to write down your thoughts.

1) Think of an incident in the past when you were hurt by someone important to you. The past hurt or trauma could be something small or something significant. Consider what it was. Was it a conversation, an action, a comment?

2) What did this instance lead you to conclude about the other person? What did you conclude about the intent of the other person?

3) Next, reflect on what you needed most in that difficult moment. How did you try to take care of yourself or stay safe at the time?





4) Now ask, “Did I feel abandoned or left behind? Did I feel that someone was putting me in danger or betraying my trust?”

5) Was there something in these questions that touched a sore spot in your relationships or communication with someone you care about? Did this activity help you better understand how you’re feeling?

6) What would an act of forgiveness look like to you to help heal this situation? What steps might you take to forgive and also offer compassion to yourself? Click [here](#) for next steps.

For references and the full practice see: [Forgiveness - What it Means and what it Doesn't](#)

For more information see [Letting go of anger through compassion](#) and [Forgiveness](#)

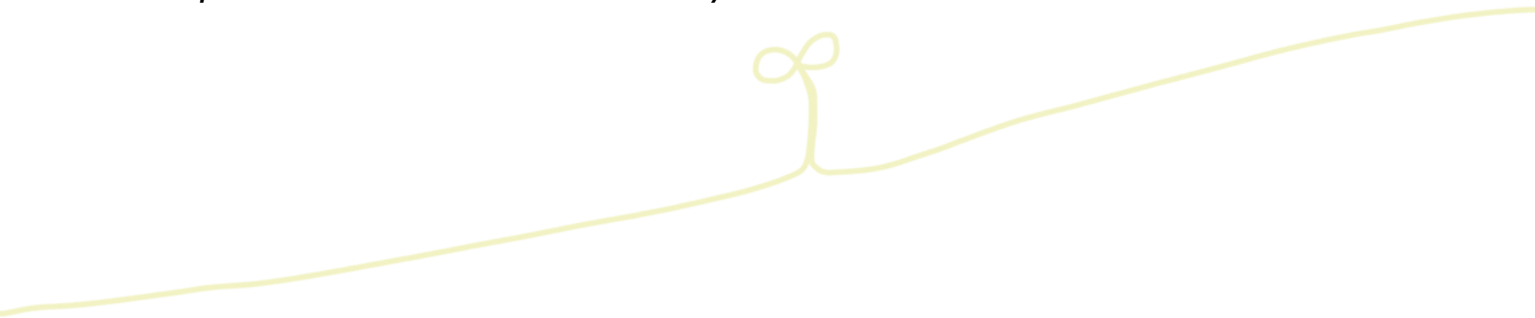




Finding Strength Through Love

By Jilleen Westbrook

(adapted from work at the Healthy Minds Institute)



Mindfulness practices have been shown to develop compassion and purpose. Below, we offer a mindfulness practice to access feelings of love for God, self, and others. If you want to learn more, [watch Sharon Salzberg](#) teach a loving kindness practice or download the [Healthy Minds](#) app.

1. Sit comfortably in a quiet place. Begin to focus on your breath and slow your breathing down.
2. Contemplate God's love. Probe your mind with thoughts like: "You are uniquely created. There is a sacred source of love that knows you and wants to connect with you."
3. Consider how profound it is to be loved and known by God. You belong to God and God belongs to you.
4. Continue to breathe. Repeat this phrase, "I belong to you, and you belong to me."
5. Now repeat this next phrase, "I am loved and I am loveable."





6. Visualize God's love moving throughout you. Think about the oxygen that flows through your body, as God's love moving through you.
7. Imagine this love in your heart, growing so large that your body cannot contain it, so it must be shared. Send that love to others. Start with those people in your life who are easy to love.
8. Let that love continue to grow even bigger, and transmit it to those who are difficult to love—including those who have hurt you, who have made you feel afraid. Love them with God's love.
9. Sit and breathe for a few minutes more. Continue to reflect on God's love, love for yourself, and love for others.
10. When you finish this contemplative practice, be aware of any intentions that come to your mind or any actions you wish to take. What might God be inviting you to do?

For the full post see [Experiencing and Emitting God's Love](#)
See also, [Cultivating a Healthy Mind](#)





Questions for Intergenerational Dialogue

By Zachary Swanson

Conversations across generations can change your mind and heart. Here's a simple way to start. Pick someone from a different generation than your own. They can be someone in your family, faith community, or workplace. Invite them to talk with you about who they are, what they care about, and their goals in life. Use one of these tailored questions to invite meaningful dialogue:

1. If you're asking a young person:

"What's something you hope will be different in the world when you're older?"

2. If you're asking someone in the middle of life (like a parent, mentor, or adult child):

"What values or lessons are you trying to pass on right now—and why?"





3. If you're asking an older adult:

"What's one piece of wisdom you've learned in life that more people should know?"

Each of these questions opens the door to sharing—and growing—together. See where these questions take you and continue the conversation with the following tips in mind.

Tips for Creating Meaningful Intergenerational Dialogue:

- **Be curious:** Ask follow-up questions. Really listen. Encourage them to ask questions.
- **Be respectful:** Personal stories are a gift. Treat them with care.
- **Be present:** Find a quiet space, free from distractions. Listen with your eyes.
- **Be reflective:** At the end, ask each other, "What stood out to you?"

Intergenerational dialogue isn't just about swapping stories, although that is part of it. It's more about making meaning together. When we talk across generations, we create belonging, grow spiritually, and remind each other that we matter.

For references and the full blog post, see: [The Importance of Friendships Across Generations](#)





Finding a Community of Support

By Jilleen Westbrook

(based upon research by Pam King)

Navigating change and growing vibrant spirituality involves belonging to healthy communities. If you are wondering if your spiritual community supports relationships and relational growth, ask yourself does it,

- Provide Opportunities for cross-generation relationships
- Offer deep connection to others
- Have community practices that lead with love
- Work to bridge divides between people
- Offer loyalty to those in community

What questions should you ask of your community?

1. What rituals and practices does your community have for affirming and nurturing members' unique gifts?
2. Does your community embrace doubt or is it shameful?
3. Are older adults open to fostering mentorship relationships with younger people?
4. How does your community provide opportunities for play, fun, and celebration together?
5. How does your community respond to issues of social justice?
6. How does your community provide opportunities for shared purpose?
7. Does your community foster deep love and compassion between people?

If you answered no to some of the above, are you able to suggest or affect changes in your current community by talking to leadership or creating programs? Think through how this activity points you toward identifying what you need in a supportive community?

For references and the full post, see [The 7 Cs of Community](#)

For more information see [The importance of larger social networks](#).

