

The Importance of Building a Support Network for Your Mental Health



If you have a health condition, having a support network is very helpful for practical reasons (helping around the house, for instance) and for emotional support. The same is true if you have a mental health condition.

It can help to talk with someone about what you're going through. Building a support network is a great way to change harmful habits, reduce painful feelings, and put yourself on a path to recovery.

What is a support network?

A support network is a group of people who:

- Have your best interests in mind
- Understand you need help
- Listen to you
- Share good advice and encouragement
- Help you with your emotions, daily tasks, and other practical things

Why is a support network important?

A support network will help in many ways. It'll improve your mental health. It can also have an impact on your physical health and your overall quality of life.

Studies show that support networks:

- Help you feel less lonely and isolated
- Reduce feelings of anxiety and depression
- Strengthen your immune system
- Help you handle stressful situations better
- Improve your motivation

The emotional support from your network can help you feel better about yourself. The people in your network can also help you feel more hopeful, and soon more able to cope on your own.

Your support network might include:

- Friends
- Family members
- Teachers
- Faith leaders
- Club members
- Healthcare professionals
- [Local support groups](#)

- [Online support groups](#)

Your network can include anyone else who you respect and trust to share what you're going through.

How can you develop your support network?

It may feel scary to reach out and ask for help. But everyone needs help at some point in their life. You can ask different people to help you in different ways.

Start by talking with a friend or family member who:

- Listens to you during both good and hard times
- Respects your privacy
- Let's you freely express and validates your emotions without criticizing or judging
- Let's you make decisions, changes, and even mistakes
- Wants to help you move forward and has your best interest in mind

The conversation might include:

- Laying the groundwork. Prepare them to have an important conversation. Let them know what you'd like to talk about and how much time you may need.
- Setting boundaries. Be clear about when you want advice and when you'd like them just to listen.
- Conveying details. Share 1 or 2 concrete examples of what's causing you stress.
- Sharing ideas for support. For example:
 - Giving encouragement or a hug
 - Helping you find the right treatment
 - Helping you get to an appointment
 - Hearing your goals for how you'll recover and checking in with you about your progress

What types of groups are best for your support network?

Try to find a group of people with mental health challenges, backgrounds, or behaviors similar to yours. This is called a peer group.

Peer groups can help you because:

- They provide a safe space that is welcoming and accepting
- People who have shared experiences have a unique ability to help each other because they've "been there"
- People in them share their stories, goals, and hopes to support growth and healing
- You'll explore your good qualities and strengths
- You'll see real cases of recovery
- They will offer you a chance to help and support someone else, especially if it is something you can relate to

What else should you consider?

Everyone's support network will be different. It takes time to build one, so it's important to be patient with yourself and others. Some friends and family may not have the skills or time to offer emotional support. That doesn't mean they don't love you.

When you talk with the right people and offer specific ways for them to help, you can start building a strong support network. You'll find that many people want to help you.

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