



Building social support in rural communities

Social connections are important for good health. People who are connected with friends, family members, neighbors and others experience better physical and emotional health, and even a longer life.

Why build social connections?

Social relationships are particularly important when people are experiencing tough times. At these times, the people you connect with can serve as an informal support network. Members of your network can:

- Listen to your concerns
- Help brainstorm options
- Comfort you when you are down
- Find ways to meet your needs



Rural challenges

People living in rural areas might face specific challenges related to transportation, distance, and fewer social activities. These challenges can make building and maintaining social connections difficult. Many rural residents experience loneliness or social isolation that affects their physical and emotional health. But there are still ways to grow and maintain your social network wherever you live.

Identifying your support network

To help you identify your support network, answer the following questions and list the names of people who give you support:

- Who listens to you when you need someone to talk to?
- Who appreciates you for who you are and what you do?
- Who stands up for you, even when they might not totally agree with what you're doing?
- Who do you consult with when you have a problem or need advice?
- Who helps you make decisions when you need to think through options and consequences?

The people you named for each of these questions form your informal support network.

Building and keeping a support network

As you look over the people you named, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have needs that are not being met? Which of these needs are most important to you now?
- Who could help fill these needs if you took the risk of asking?
- What specific steps could you take to expand your support network? What things can you do this week? Next week?

Consider approaching your daily life with the goal of making friendships that will add to your support network. The process of building a support network is like making a patchwork quilt — a variety of different pieces are added over the years. Sometimes an unusual piece adds some special quality that you had not expected. Sometimes you may need to patch over places where the material has faded or worn thin.

Supportive friendships often come about indirectly from working and socializing with others. In order for this to occur, it may be helpful to reach out to others by:



- Taking time for your family.
- Volunteering with community groups and organizations.
- Visiting your neighbors.
- Joining a club or hobby group.

Take time to tend to your social relationships in order to maintain your support network. By reaching out to others and taking advantage of their support and friendship, you can gain strength to deal with problems, take control of difficult situations, prevent isolation and promote physical and emotional health.

For more information:

Call the **Minnesota Farm and Rural Helpline** 833-600-2670 x 1

Visit the **Minnesota University of Minnesota Coping with Rural Stress** webpage: z.umn.edu/ruralstress


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