



# CONNECTING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Creating and sustaining a community around you is important to your mental health. Humans are social creatures, meaning our brains are wired to seek connection with others. These connections allow us to share interests and feel a sense of belonging and security. As young as infancy, babies will point to objects as a way to share their interests and enjoy seeing their caregiver show interest in return.<sup>1</sup> The need to be in relationships with one another is deeply ingrained in our DNA.

For BIPOC individuals, making connections with those of similar backgrounds has not only provided a sense of belonging and solidarity but has also been a necessary method of survival. Through the power of community connection, BIPOC individuals have been able to sustain themselves and their cultural values.

## FIND COMMUNITY IN PERSON

Community and connection may be different for everyone. For BIPOC individuals, this need often also centers around safety, inclusion, and purpose. To be in community with others may sometimes easily blend with day-to-day tasks and activities, and a sense of connection may exist in spaces such as neighborhoods, bodegas, mosques, sports events, dance studios, restaurants, art shows, or community centers. In neighborhoods, individuals are able to build stronger bonds and often look out for one another. Meal trains, carpooling, community safety groups, or childcare networks can all serve as vital forms of connection and support that help meet physical and psychological needs. Community-led actions include social justice rallies, charity walks, community gardens, collaborative kitchens, protests, town hall meetings, child-friendly events, and other community advocacy events. Check out the list below for more ideas on making stronger community connections:

- **Get involved in community activities.** Join community organizations or volunteer for community events. If there isn't a community organization, consider creating one.
  - **Create a community initiative.** Discuss common issues among your community members to determine community needs. Ask your neighbors about their experiences in your area. If there is a common need and interest, this could be an opportunity to unite and act for change.
- **Attend community events.** Go to events such as festivals, fairs, and community gatherings to meet others in your community and build relationships.
- **Reach out to neighbors.** Introduce yourself to neighbors and engage in friendly conversation to establish a support network.
- **Advocate for change.** Get involved in local politics and advocate for policies that support a better community and environment.
- **Share resources.** Engage with local "buy nothing" or similar groups to share items like extra food or household items.
- **Create safe spaces.** Consider getting involved with community gardens or neighborhood watch groups to build a sense of safety and security.
- **Participate in cultural events.** Join in if your community hosts cultural events.
- **Support local businesses.** Shopping at or even sharing social posts from local businesses can help retain community culture and stimulate the local economy.
- **Listen to and learn from others.** Take time to hear from others in the community to build understanding, inclusivity, and empathy.



## FIND COMMUNITY IN VIRTUAL SPACES

For those who may be physically distant from others within their community, or who may not have the ability to go to in-person events, virtual spaces can offer a sense of community. Online spaces allow people to connect with others of similar backgrounds and share personal experiences, challenges, supports, or successes. The following tips can help you make stronger connections in virtual spaces:

- **Join online groups or engage with social media.** Look for online groups or communities that share similar interests or goals, which can help you build relationships with like-minded individuals.
- **Use messaging platforms.** If you feel comfortable with it, exchange contact information with individuals to make long-distance friendships feel easier. FaceTime, Zoom, text messaging, direct messaging, or emails are options to help you stay in touch even when you are not able to see one another in person.
- **Participate in online events.** Attend webinars, online conferences, virtual events, or volunteer virtually to connect with others who share similar interests or goals.
- **Create online content.** Share your blogs, podcasts, or videos to connect with others who share similar interests or experiences.
- **Host online discussions.** Make a space for meaningful conversation by having discussions on video chatting platforms.
- **Use online resources.** Look for online mental health support groups and educational resources that speak to you or connect you with others who share similar experiences or challenges.
- **Show kindness and respect.** No matter how you choose to engage online, treating others with kindness and respect can help create a welcoming and supportive digital community for all.

## ADVOCATE FOR MENTALLY HEALTHY SPACES

Connecting with others in your community is easier when you are in a healthy environment. Below are some tips on how to support your community and yourself in creating mentally healthy spaces:

- **Educate others.** Talk to your community about why it's important to create spaces that are welcoming and inclusive for people with mental health challenges.
- **Start conversations.** Sometimes just speaking up about mental health will encourage others to share their experiences and concerns.
- **Organize wellness events.** Work with community organizations, leaders, and mental health professionals to organize events and activities that promote mental health and well-being.
- **Advocate for the creation of safe spaces.** Whether it's a community center, spiritual gathering place, or school, advocate and work toward creating safe spaces where people can feel comfortable talking about their mental health challenges without fear of judgment or stigma.
- **Seek support.** Connect with mental health professionals and community resources to get the support you need in your neighborhood or community.

### SOURCES

Wickramaratne, P. J., et al. (2022). Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review. *PLoS one*, 17(10). e0275004. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275004>