

Tell us what you think!



MAINTAINING SOCIAL SUPPORT IN UNIVERSITY

Check out the evidence!

As university students, we can get so busy with all our responsibilities that we may neglect our social life. However, **maintaining our connections with others is really important.** The social support they provide can positively affect our overall well-being and academic achievement.^{8, 11}

WHAT IS SOCIAL SUPPORT?

Social support is the comfort we get when we feel that “we are loved and/or cared about” by different people in our life, like our friends, family, partner, classmates, etc.¹



It's a pleasant sense of belonging when we know there are people who care about us and that we can rely on.¹

THE BENEFITS OF RECEIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Receiving social support is related to:



Better health outcomes^{4, 13}



Less stress⁶



Better overall well-being⁶



Higher academic achievement and grades⁹



Helping us find resources we might need in the future⁹

HOW TO ENHANCE OUR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Make it a priority!

It's easy to get busy and make excuses for not prioritizing social relationships!



However, without spending time together, it's hard to maintain our friendships.⁵



So, set aside time in your schedule for building and strengthening your social support networks.

For example: Make Friday night “Friend night” and manage your other responsibilities, like schoolwork, the rest of the week.



Remember that socializing can actually **help us**:



- feel better
- do better academically



so it's important to make time!^{8, 11}

Pressed for time?

Some of us may postpone socializing because we feel we need a substantial block of time for any social activity.

That's not true! Below are some tips for socializing when you're pressed for time:

Call a friend as you commute to school and keep them posted about what's going on in your life.^{12, 14}



Send a text message to check up on a friend.



Meet up for a quick chat in a park (if it's warm out!) or even a library.



Be sure to tell your friend these short check-ins are because even though **you don't have a lot of time**, **their friendship is important to you.**

View the Time Management resource!



Make use of technology

As we know, post-pandemic technology can make it easier to connect socially with friends near and far.

Watch a movie together through WatchParty on Netflix or Group Watch on Disney Plus.



Play an online game together (e.g., Jackbox).



Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime and eat dinner together.



But, we know that in-person connection also serves a purpose - **both ways are effective in maintaining our social connections!** Choose the one you prefer and is available to you.

The way we communicate matters!

Sometimes the way we communicate makes it difficult to connect with others. Here are some tips to consider:

VENTING

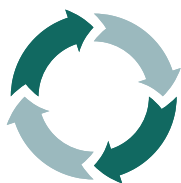
Often, when we're frustrated with something that's happening to us, we vent to our friends.

This can help us **blow off some steam** by expressing ourselves.¹⁰



Our friends can also **support** us or give us some ideas on how to **resolve** the problem.

Sometimes, venting can turn into an endless cycle, where we continue to be frustrated with the same situation with no resolution.



If that happens, this can make you and others feel even more frustrated and angry.



If we feel like we may be cycling through the same problem without trying to consider solutions, **step back and reflect**. Are there solutions to this problem?

If not, perhaps it is time to move out of focusing solely on the problem.

Relying on venting over and over again as the focus of conversation can **negatively impact our relationship** with others.



If you notice this happening, **try talking about a different topic or move towards discussing possible solutions** to get out of the cycle.



GRATITUDE

Practicing gratitude can help foster positive outlooks and is linked to better perceived social support and higher life satisfaction.^{7, 15}



One way to practice gratitude is to communicate it to others.

Express your gratitude for the people in your life and let them know you appreciate them.

Communicating gratitude also tends to incline others towards liking us. Curious to know more about practicing gratitude?

[View the Gratitude Journal resource!](#)

START WITH SOMETHING POSITIVE

Although we may often talk about the terrible weather or complain about instructors as conversation starters, having a more positive outlook helps us build stronger connections with others.¹⁰

Take note of how you often you start conversations:
is it with a **negative** statement? or a more **positive** one?

See if you can start your interactions with positive statements such as:

To help connect with another person, try and **mirror the other person's tone of voice and body language** during a conversation.

"Oh, I am happy he gave us an extra week for the assignment."

"I love how everything looks when it snows!"

"Do you know where I could find the best coffee/tea on campus?"

"Your questions are great in this class, you always ask what I'm thinking."

This may help bridge some cultural differences in body language!

THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE

Keep in mind, we often communicate beyond just our words!

Leaving your arms loosely at your side and tilting your body towards the person lets them know you're **open to a connection**.



If your **arms are crossed** or you're **faced away**, people may think you're **closed off** to conversation.



In effective connections, we tend to mirror the other person's tone and body language. This can help show that **we're interested and engaged** in what they have to say!

HOW TO LISTEN ACTIVELY



! Beyond mirroring, there are other strategies we can use to show the other person we're paying attention and engaging in the conversation. This makes them feel liked and respected, helping us create a connection.^{2,3}

Tips for listening actively:



1 During a conversation, **make eye contact** on average 2-3 seconds at a time before looking away and coming back.

2 Ask **follow-up questions**: "After that happened, what did you decide to do?"²



3 **Avoid distractions** like your phone or other screens during a conversation.

4 **Don't go straight to solutions** – listening is listening, it is not solution finding!

Take airpods out/headphones off.

5 Allow people to speak **uninterrupted**.

6 Demonstrate your listening with a **supportive, empathetic statement**:

"So it sounds like you're really frustrated."

View the Effective Communication resource!

Check out our **Effective Communication** infographic for more tips on active listening and helpful conversations!

FEEDBACK & CONTACT INFORMATION

EDUCATION
FOR
MENTAL
HEALTH
RESILIENCE



View the reference list for
this infographic



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