

HEALTH Education

Creating a Support System

What is a support system?

As we move into adult responsibilities such as work or parenting, we tend to let relationships fade into the background. These responsibilities taking us away from relationship can lead to isolation, which is a major cause of depression in adults. You may feel stuck and alone and unsure how to find relief. One of the most effective ways to combat these feelings is to create a support system.

A support system is made up people who provide support, respect, and care. These individuals can be friends or family, people in your community, or even an acquaintance you talk to occasionally. What you're looking for are interactions that friendly and positive and leaves you feeling happier than before that interaction. Any social interactions can have a positive influence on your mental health, as humans are social be nature. More social connections are linked to improved happiness, self esteem, self acceptance, and the ability to cope in difficult times. Having a strong network of people that are constantly providing support is important for your overall social well-being. Social wellness is just as important as your physical and emotional wellness.



How do you build one?

Aside from the built in network consisting of your family and longtime friends, growing your support system can happen through a variety of ways! Some ideas include:

- Volunteer
- Join a gym or sign up for a sports league
- Join a club or professional organization
- Introduce yourself to neighbors and co-workers you don't know
- Use online resources such as social networking sites to easily connect with others

It is also beneficial to note the importance of sustaining your current friendships or relationships in order to keep them strong. Successful relationships are a two way street. If your friends are there for you, then it is important to be there for them as well. This allows for the friendships to grow and become even stronger.

The goal of social support is to decrease stress. If you are looking to decrease stress by developing a support network, start with people who are already in your life. You may want to make a list and determine who is healthy and positive and who is not. You may want to limit contact with the negative people in your life. Negative people can drain your energy and bring you down. Watch for these types of people who may be negative: blamers, liars, alcoholics, drug abusers and those who put you down. Your time and energy need to be invested on those who make you feel good about yourself.



Why are they important?

There are many benefits to having a strong support system, the most important being an improved quality of life. You will find yourself happier, healthier and more resilient than those without strong social ties. Another benefit is knowing that your network will be able to provide guidance, support and advice during times of uncertainty. This helps to boost your sense of security.

Navigating through the ups and downs of life will be made easier by a strong support system. Studies have also shown that social support can reduce depression and anxiety. Some people do best with a large support group, while others need a small support system. Giving and receiving support from others is a basic human need.

Support systems are only effective if you use them.

Let's work through the following roadblock example, "I don't like to rely on others." It's hard for many people to ask for help. Consider the following questions if this is an obstacle for you in using your support system.

- When do I ask for help?
- In what situations have I asked for help in the past?
- When I ask for help, what am I feeling?
- What do I think will happen?
- Do I have negative or positive expectations?

Identify one situation you are dealing with in your life right now that you are overwhelmed with. Look through the list of supporters you made in this exercise, pick one person you can ask for assistance...and ASK.



References:

<https://roadtogrowthcounseling.com/how-to-build-a-support-system/>

<http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/developing-your-support-system.html>

<https://www.bjceap.com/Blog/ArtMID/448/ArticleID/139/The-Importance-of-Developing-a-Support-System>

