

Connecting with others

It is much easier for depression to take over when you are isolated and out of touch with others. Building relationships and support networks has been shown to offer significant help against depression.

This worksheet will help you evaluate your current levels of social contact and plan for including more constructive and beneficial social contact into your daily routine.

1. Keep a social contact diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of any social contact you have during your day, including even very small interactions like those with shop assistants or bus drivers. Record the quality of that contact (eg. did you exchange smiles with the bus driver or just avoid eye contact?) and any notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood associated with or following each contact. Keep the diary for at least a week in the first instance.

This exercise may feel quite painful or difficult if loneliness or social exclusion have played a role in triggering your depression and/or depression has led you to isolate yourself. Try to undertake this observation stage with a spirit of curiosity rather than judgement.

Consider:

Read the info on the 'Connecting with others' page and consider its relevance to you in relation to the record you have kept. It is very likely that you will have been able to record unhelpful thoughts and attitudes which are contributing to you keeping you isolated. You can find out more about how to deal with these in the 'Changing attitudes' section.

For now you can just summarise what you have learnt about the patterns of your social contact. What do you notice about your social habits? Which social contacts had a positive effect on your mood? Can you identify times when you are tending to isolate yourself and what the effect of this is on your mood? Evaluate your social contact in terms of its underlying motivations – on each occasion are you seeking positive, open connection with others, or are your social contacts complicated by concerns with status, 'popularity' or other unhelpful judgements?

My social contact evaluation summary:



Brainstorm:

Make a list of the people you come into social contact with on a regular basis, and how you can improve your connection with them. Add in new activities or clubs you could join in with to meet new people at the same time as pursuing an interest. Also add in the people in your wider circle of connection who you can make an effort to maintain contact with and could also open up to about how you are feeling (eg. friends and family back home).

You can improve the quality of connection even in fleeting social contact eg. by smiling and exchanging eye contact with the supermarket teller. Also bear in mind that people mostly respond well to friendly social contact, especially if you show interest in them and their experiences.

2. My social contact plan

Decide on a few of the simplest, least threatening ways to increase your social contact and connection with others. Include an example for relative strangers (eg. the librarian stamping your books), acquaintances (eg. people on your course you don't know well), and people in your closer social circle (eg. housemates):

Example:

This week to improve my social contact and connection, I will:

1. Connect with a 'stranger' by: Smiling and catching the eye of the supermarket teller when I do my shopping
2. Connect with an acquaintance by: Speaking to someone in my tutor group about our latest assignment, to see if they also found it quite hard
3. Connect with someone close to me by: Phoning my sister and asking how things are going with her these days
4. Make one step towards meeting new people by: Checking at the Students Union for volunteering opportunities



My social contact intention statement:

This week to improve my social contact and connection, I will:

1. Connect with a 'stranger' by:

_____ (when)
_____ (where)
_____ (how/long)

2. Connect with an acquaintance by:

_____ (when)
_____ (where)
_____ (how/long)

3. Connect with someone close to me by:

_____ (when)
_____ (where)
_____ (how/long)


4. Make one step towards meeting new people by:

_____ (when)
_____ (where)
_____ (how/long)

3. Evaluation

Make sure your initial steps are not too ambitious and make sure you reward yourself with recognition for attempting them however well or badly you feel they go. Check back after a few weeks to evaluate how you have done, and to give yourself new social contact goals.

You can build on these steps by doing the worksheet on the 'Talking to someone' page as well as looking at the 'Building support networks' section.



***"I made the effort to get involved more – go out to events with people or to a museum – whereas my gut instinct would be NOT to go. I made myself do it and the more I did it the more I found I was enjoying doing those things."* – Hiresh**

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