

# YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

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*What to do to build yours*



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# What is a social support network

## *Your social network*

### **Online**

No doubt you're familiar with social networks online, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, but did you know there are a huge number of networks with special interests? Click [here](#) for a list on Wikipedia. There may be something of interest to you..

### **In your own environment**

Your social network is made up of people within your own surroundings, and with whom you feel a personal connection.

Here, we're going to look at your physical social network. Real-life people can make the biggest difference in how you're going to get through this difficult time.

Social support is the care you give and receive from people you have a personal connection with. It can be divided in practical support, emotional support, tangible/intangible support and companionship.

Who might these people be?

Research has shown that our social circles, and thereby our social support networks, are getting smaller. In other words, the potential to get lost and lonely is increasing evermore.

Here I'm hoping to open your eyes to all the possibilities with potentially lifelong benefits.

If talking to people feels scary to you, then I'd say: feel the fear and do it anyway!

So, let's see who you potentially have access to and think about them without any judgement.

Tick those you *may* have access to, *exclude no persons or group* at this point.

## Please note

Don't make any judgments on how large your social network should be either. A Facebook account with thousands of people counts for very little. Quality here goes way above quantity!

### Family

- Grandparents
- Parents
- Siblings
- Uncles
- Aunts
- Nieces
- Nephews

### Work

- Direct colleagues
- Colleagues in different roles
- People at neighbouring businesses
- Managers
- The boss

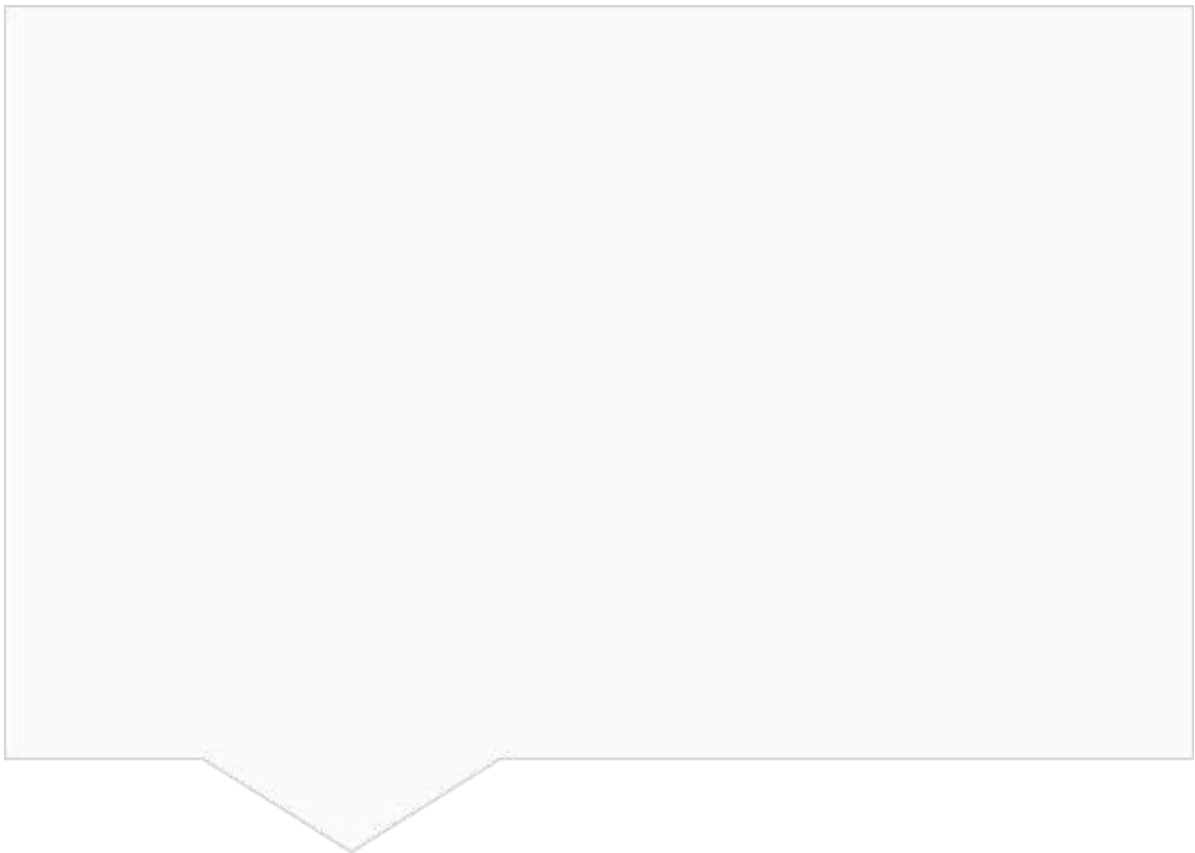
### Locally

- Friends
- That person in that local shop
- Neighbours
- Fellow students
- Fellow hobbyists
- Other worshippers
- People at a local charity
- visitors at a local charity

Think too of people you have long not been in touch with.

*List all the people you know by name or description*

Yes, everyone! At this point it's really important that you don't make any judgment on whether or not they could be of any help to you.



*Now fill in the names in the columns below*

Practical support	Emotional support	Advice of any kind	Companionship

Auntie such as so can make a great companion, but would have no time for someone crying on their shoulder.

It would be ill advised to make a friend (or lover for that matter) out of your boss, however, he or she may be able to help you practically or give you advice.

When you open up about the fact that you're struggling and in need of help, chances are that people surprise you.

Those who you might have expected to step up to the plate

and help out may disappoint you. I have found as a counsellor, that clients discovered great sources of emotional support from people they'd never have expected it from.

### *What to do if your social circle is really tiny*

There may be all sorts of reasons you find yourself with few acquaintances, friends and family around you, or even at a distance. Maybe you've just moved, or you're shy, or you'd be much rather on your own and don't need a lot of people around you. As I mentioned earlier, you don't need to have a large social circle, but you do need some people around you.

However, this is where you're going to have to be brave.

Here are some tips:

- Leave your phone in your pocket when you're out and about.
- Simply start with saying a cheery "hello", "good morning/afternoon/evening", "great weather today,

don't you think", to people you see regularly (and appear trustworthy!). Smile and walk on. Stick at it regardless.

- Look out for opportunities to be of help. That means looking around you instead of at your phone.
- Look for volunteering opportunities. Not only does volunteering offer an opportunity to make new friends, it can also help with your own individual search for meaning and purpose (another really important aspect of seeing you through difficult times)
- Look out for free (or paid for) classes. Research has shown that doing novel things together helps people to bond.

### *Not sure what to talk about to people?*

- Ask people about their families
- Where they're from
- Do they live locally
- How long have they've lived here



- What are they most looking forward to this year (people tend to like people who help them to focus on the positive things in life).
- Have they got any plans for holidays, days out
- What are they most proud of.
- If they have any hobbies.

Then just listen (leave your phone in your pocket or bag no matter how often it demands your attention), nod encouragingly, and ask them to expand on something.