



## Integration: SOCIAL CONNECTION

“We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

- Dorothy Day

Humans evolved to be social creatures and to live in tribes. No one can lead a flourishing life alone. Good relationships and experiencing social connections are some of the most necessary and important aspects of the good life. Even the simple act of talking to strangers on the street or in line boosts our mood and sense of belonging more than we expect.

**Your Integration is to strengthen or forge or a new social connection each day this week.** There are three key levels to social connection:

- **Intimate relationships:** Partners that that you can trust and confide in emotionally
- **Social friends:** Companions that you socialize with, support, and with whom you can forge quality connections
- **Communities:** Collective networks or groups, such as parishes, sports teams, or book clubs, with common purpose or interests<sup>1</sup>

Try to strengthen or connect with each of these types of relationships this week! You need healthy connections in all three areas for a good life.<sup>2</sup>

### EXAMPLES

You can (with appropriate physical distancing) [strike up a 5-minute conversation with a neighbor](#), check in with a coworker or friend on how their day is going, or [chat with your barista or delivery person](#). Or write a handwritten note to a friend or family member and mail it to them. Be sure to genuinely, if briefly, connect with another person on a human level. **At least once this week, take an hour to have a sustained conversation with someone you care about.**

<sup>1</sup> These are inverted from Dr. Vivek Murthy’s distillation of the three kinds of loneliness in psychological research: intimate, relational, and collective. Murthy, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, HarperCollins, Kindle Edition, pg. 8.

<sup>2</sup> “These three dimensions together reflect the full range of high-quality social connections that humans need in order to thrive. The lack of relationships in any of these dimensions can make us lonely, which helps to explain why we may have a supportive marriage yet still feel lonely for friends and community.” Ibid.

**“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?”**

- Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

## SOCIAL CONNECTION TIPS

- **Balance:** While social connection is important, solitude and silence are equally important and necessary to a flourishing life.
  - A healthy balance or [spiritual symmetry](#) between the twin needs for solitude and community is essential.
  - Think of it as an [Aristotelian moderation](#) between solitude and community.
- **No Yes/No Questions:** Ask people [universal, meaningful, and open-ended questions](#) such as “What was the best moment of your day?” that can’t be answered with “fine”.
- **Go Deeper:** If you want to get really deep, try our adapted version of the [vulnerability questions](#). The questions are selected from a psychological study<sup>3</sup> on the development of vulnerability and closeness in relationships that went viral after the [New York Times published a version](#) of it.
- **Build Community:** Joining (or creating!) communities can be a wonderful way to build relationships as it makes consistent connections an automatic habit and less of a constant choice.
  - This can be anything - a workout group, Bible study, podcast club, gatherings to [analyze Harry Potter through spiritual reading methods](#), etc.
  - Check out David Brooks’ [Weave: The Social Fabric Project](#) for more information.
  - Watch [Priya Parker’s TED Talk](#) on how to turn average meetings into transformative gatherings.

## SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS

- **Better Health:** Research demonstrates the effects of social connection on our physical and emotional health, such as increased longevity, lower rates of anxiety and depression, and better emotional regulation.<sup>4</sup>
- **Intimacy:** The quality of your close relationships (i.e., that you can be vulnerable with each other) really matters for long term health and happiness.<sup>5</sup>
- **Surprising Small Talk Results:** Despite everyone expecting that they would dislike connecting with strangers while in line or on public transportation, studies demonstrate that people almost always find it more enjoyable than solitude controls.<sup>6</sup>
- **Small Acts:** Even brief eye contact and acts like high-fiving releases oxytocin to increase trust and it lowers your cortisol (stress) levels.<sup>7</sup>

**“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”**

- Matthew 18:20

<sup>3</sup> Aron, Arthur, et al., [“The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings”](#), *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1997, pp. 363–377.

<sup>4</sup> Seppala, Emma, [“Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection”](#), *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education*, Stanford University School of Medicine, 28 June 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Waldinger, Robert, [“What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness”](#), *TED: Ideas worth spreading*, Nov. 2015. For more details on the Harvard Study of Adult Development, [visit their website](#).

<sup>6</sup> Epley, Nicholas, and Juliana Schroeder, [“Mistakenly Seeking Solitude”](#), *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, vol. 143, no. 5, 2014, pp. 1980–1999, doi:10.1037/a0037323.

<sup>7</sup> Pinker, Susan, [“The Secret to Living Longer May Be Your Social Life”](#), *TED: Ideas worth spreading*, Apr. 2017. For the original studies that the speaker summarizes, see the footnotes tab.