

# Supportive relationships help manage stress

By Erin Wiley

Stress is just a fact of life. Between work, family obligations, keeping up with friends, and trying to take care of ourselves, there's a lot to do and a limited time in which to do it. In order to handle stress well we need healthy coping skills, and one of the best is a strong social network. We sometimes neglect our personal relationships in favor of dealing with issues that demand more immediate attention, but maintaining these relationships is essential. Social support can be a crucial source of strength and restoration in times of stress. There are five main areas in which we can develop social support.

**Family:** They are our first supporters. Not everyone can count on their family of origin, but for those who can, it's often a great place to be yourself and feel emotionally supported. When one's family of origin is not healthy or available, we can create our own family of sorts through the friends we choose.

**Friends:** Finding a group of people with whom you can "do life" can bring great peace of mind. New or old, friendships are a security net we can rely upon in times of need. Whether it's friends from high school, a crafting group, sports club, or church family, friends are a major source of emotional support.

**Co-workers:** Though co-workers aren't

always as close as our chosen friends, we spend many, if not most, of our waking hours with them! Having work pals with whom you can collaborate, joke and share your personal life can be another source of support in your network.

**Intimate relationships:** These can be romantic in nature, or a mentorship with a spiritual leader in your church, an accountability partner, or a professional you admire. These are relationships in which we should ideally feel free to discuss issues that weigh us down, ask for advice, and share our hopes and dreams.

**A Therapist:** Sometimes the aforementioned groups are not enough to get us through life's most difficult struggles. When you have worn out the ears of those around you, or require a nonbiased opinion, a therapist might be just what you need. A trained professional who can

offer insight into our life is an excellent source of emotional support when we find we need some extra reinforcement.

If you find yourself lacking in one or more of these areas, pick up the phone today and connect with someone for increased emotional support in your life!

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