

AND ANOTHER THING ...

Supportive Relationships Help Manage Stress

'Social support can be a crucial source of strength and restoration.'

by Erin Wiley

Community Contributor



Erin Wiley is a licensed counselor.

Photo courtesy of Erin Wiley

Stress is a fact of life. Between work, family obligations and time for self-care, there's a lot to do and a limited time in which to do it. In order to handle stress well, one needs healthy coping skills, and one of the best is a strong social network. Sometimes we neglect 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 you can develop social support.

Family

They are your first supporters, and often have been there for your life's greatest triumphs and most painful losses. Not everyone can count on their family, but for those who can, it's often a great place to be yourself. You may need to initiate family gatherings — not everyone will see their value, or make them a priority. Set a goal for spending time together: perhaps a once-a-month Sunday dinner, a Friday night pizza party or a biweekly lunch date with a cousin, sibling or parent. Skype or Facetime are great options for those with family far away: schedule a weekly chat to reconnect "face-to-face" with those you love. When your family of origin is not a healthy choice, you can create a chosen family through friends.

Friends

Finding a group of people with whom you can "do life" can bring greater enjoyment to the things that already bring you happiness. New or old, friendships are a security net you can rely upon in times of need. Whether it's friends from high school, a crafting group, sports club or your place of worship, friends can be a major source of emotional support. Try a monthly GNO — Girls'/Guys' Night Out — to reconnect the old gang. Reach out to someone with whom you think you might enjoy developing a closer friendship, and make it a goal to spend time with him or her. If you are a loss for where to

start, meetup.com is an excellent resource to connect people with shared interests and beliefs. With numerous groups around your area, you are bound to find one or two to check out. Not every attempt you make to initiate or build friendships will be met with equal enthusiasm, so continue making the effort until you feel you are developing the friends you want and need in your life.

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. Perhaps an after-hours volleyball team, a shared community-based volunteer project or lunchtime discussions can prove to be successful ways to grow closer with friends at work. And if your office is at home, there are groups for people who work at home, including moms. Check online or in your local paper for lists of times and dates of these types of meetings.

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 you should feel free to share your hopes and dreams, and discuss your struggles and accomplishments. You may need to put forth some extra effort to find and develop these types of relationships, but the energy put into them is well worth the benefits you will experience.

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 point of view, a therapist might be just what you need. A counselor can provide some structure and accountability for goals that can improve the quality of your life. They can accompany you on a journey of personal discovery, and can help you strengthen your social support structure.

If you find yourself lacking in one or more of these areas of support people, make the decision today to and connect with someone for increased emotional support in your life.

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