NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

New York State Trauma-Informed Network & Resource Center

Community Wellness

What is Community?

We often think of a “community” as a physical place where people meet to talk, learn, and spend time together. But what really makes a community are the people— unique individuals sharing common interests, values and connections.

Community is about feeling connected and having a support system built on trust, safety, belonging, and care for each other. As people, we all want to feel close to others, and being part of a community helps us do that. Most of us are part of many different communities that come together and make our lives better in different ways.

Being an active member of a community brings many benefits. People in communities tend to encourage each other, which can create a positive ripple effect. When we spend time with people who care about and focus on wellness, we’re more likely to pick up those habits and share them with others. Being in a community also helps us become stronger by connecting with people who make us feel safe, understood, and remind us that we’re part of something bigger.

Being part of a community helps us understand ourselves and others better. Even though people in a community often have a shared identity, we can still learn from each other's different experiences. Community gives us the chance to build strong relationships, meaningful connection, and a feeling of belonging to something that matters.

The Science Behind Social Connection

Social connection refers to the relationships and groups we belong to, how they work, and the support and sense of belonging we feel from them. These relationships can include family, friends, coworkers, sports teams, and more. Our feeling of connection can change depending on how important the relationship is and how supported we feel. Overall, social connection is highly important for our social, emotional, and physical health.

What are the benefits of social connection?

- Lower rates of anxiety & depression
- Higher self-esteem & empathy
- Better emotional regulation skills
- Improve quality of sleep
- Help reduce the risk of:
  - Heart disease
  - Stroke
  - Dementia
  - Depression and anxiety

Ways to Create Community & Connection

How can I increase my social connection?

Acts of service
Compassion and volunteering have positive health benefits. Search the web for volunteer opportunities near you and bring a friend or drop off a care package to someone who is going through a tough time

Take care of yourself
Stress can make it hard for us to want to connect with others. Self-care does work so try to do at least one self-care act a day, even if it is reading your favorite book or doing 5 minutes of meditation

Join a new group
Participating in a community group can help foster a sense of belonging and allow you to meet new people. Join a local fitness class or community group

Reduce activities that leave you feeling disconnected
Social media is a great way to connect with others, but too much social media can cause feelings of loneliness. Try setting a timer for your favorite social media apps or make a plan to stay off your phone right after you wake up in the morning

Practice gratitude and being emotionally responsive
Responsive relationships make us feel care for, validated, and seen. When someone is responsive in a relationship, we are more likely to be responsive back. Verbal acts of gratitude like “Thank you for being there for me” or “I appreciate your friendship” can go a long way

Resources

Below are resources you can share with your community:

Breath-Body-Mind Practice Sessions	**Join the Breath-Body-Mind Community!** BBM is a set of gentle exercises that are based on science and designed to help with stress. All BBM sessions are free and open to all New Yorkers. Scan the QR code to join a virtual session and share with your friends, family, and co-workers! • English sessions happen every Tuesday at 6am, 12pm, & 8pm • Spanish sessions happen every Wednesday at 8pm
Be Well	The **'Be Well'** public awareness campaign helps people understand the importance of mental wellness and the impacts of stress and trauma. This website gives New Yorkers accessible mental health tips and free ways to improve their well-being. The site is user-friendly, available in multiple languages, and provides direct links to immediate crisis supports. It's also inclusive of all populations across New York State, regardless of age, background, or specific mental health needs. Check out Be Well's "What Can I Do?" page for actionable steps you can take today!
10 Essential Books for Healing and Becoming Trauma-Informed	NYS TINRC team – including a staff psychologist – has compiled a list of some of the best books written on the subject of trauma. Use this list for your next book club read!

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