

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Washington Campus Coalition for the Public Good

June Professional Development Workshop

Hi everyone! Thank you for coming to my workshop on support networks. Could everyone take a moment to introduce themselves in the chat? Just say your name, where you're serving, and what you're hoping to get out of this workshop today.

As you know, we're going to talk about how to build support networks. This topic feels especially relevant since it's pride month but also everyone as a whole is still recovering from how isolating the covid pandemic was.

I mentioned pride month because people in the LGBTQ community have this concept called "found family" or a group of people who aren't biologically related who provide ongoing social support to each other. This concept resonates with a lot of people in the community because, after coming out, many find that some of their family and friends either don't approve or want nothing to do with them. A lack of social support is a major contributing factor to mental health and substance abuse issues, so it's important for LGBTQ individuals to find people to add to their support network.

Now not everyone here is part of the LGBTQ community, but everyone here did go through the covid pandemic. I don't know about you, but there were a lot of people I stopped talking to when we were in the lockdown and it felt like I had to rebuild most of my support network after all the restrictions were lifted. I had to re-evaluate all my previous relationships with people and ask myself who belongs in my support network and who doesn't. I'm hoping that this workshop helps everyone here do the same.

WHY DO I NEED A SUPPORT NETWORK?

A support network helps you feel connected to a larger social group and fosters a sense of belonging. The people in your support network can help you achieve your personal and professional goals and get through life transitions. Having multiple people in your life to support you can help you see problems in a number of different ways and give you a more complete picture. When you only have one person, that may not be enough and you could end up over-relying on that person, leaving them exhausted.

HAVING A STRONG SUPPORT NETWORK ACTUALLY HELPS IMPROVE:

<i>Problem-solving skills</i>	<i>Autonomy</i>
<i>Confidence</i>	<i>Self-esteem</i>
<i>Resilience</i>	<i>Mental health</i>
<i>Wellbeing</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>

Having a strong support network actually helps improve problem-solving skills, autonomy, confidence, self-esteem, resilience, mental health, wellbeing, and life satisfaction.

When you hear different perspectives from people in your support network and how they solved their own problems, that improves your problem solving skills. Being able to solve your own problems makes you more autonomous and feel more confident in your own abilities.

Having people available to support you can also help you recognize your own self-worth, leading to an increase in self-esteem.

When you feel like you can rely on other people to support you through stressful times, you're more likely to bounce back since you're not constantly worrying about how you'll get through tough situations, making you more resilient. Resilience also helps protect you from mental health issues, leading to an overall improved sense of wellbeing.

Life satisfaction increases as a direct result of everything else increasing.

WHAT IS A SUPPORT NETWORK?



A support network is a system of relationships and connections that you have with others that provides you with mental, emotional, and/or practical support when you need it most. It is also there when things are going well to sustain you and keep you going.

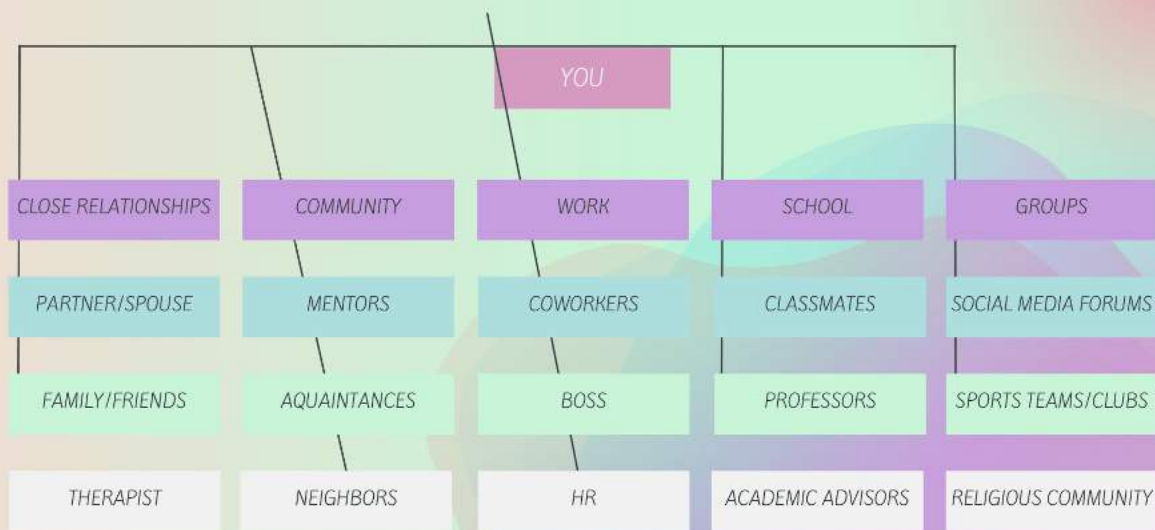
Who is included? These networks can consist of family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other individuals who play significant roles in a person's life. They can be formal or informal, and are crucial for promoting well-being, resilience, and overall mental and physical health.

What exactly is a support network? A support network is a system of relationships and connections that you have with others that provides you with mental, emotional, and/or practical support when you need it most. It is also there when things are going well to sustain you and keep you going. This means you don't need to go to people in your support network when things aren't going well. You can have people there to enjoy the good times with you as well.

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Your support network doesn't need to be just family and friends or even people that you know that well. A coworker who you don't know that well but is always helpful or willing to cover a shift can be part of your support network. So can a neighbor who lets you borrow salt or sugar. Even medical and mental health professionals can be considered part of your support network. There just needs to be a mutual interest in forming some kind of relationship. A stranger who helps you out with something once that you never see again would not be part of your support network.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?



This is what a support network could look like. You have your close relationships, like a romantic partner, family and friends, and a therapist. People from the community who support you could include mentors, acquaintances, or neighbors. From work, you have your coworkers, boss, and maybe someone from HR. Classmates, professors, and academic advisors can all help support you with your educational endeavors. People from social media, sports teams or clubs, religious communities can also be an important part of your support network. It looks different for everyone.

TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT



EMOTIONAL

Expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring

- Close friends and family members providing comfort
- Someone who can listen to your problems



APPRAISAL

Information that is useful for self-evaluation

- A friend offers you words of encouragement
- When a therapist helps you recognize your strengths



INFORMATIONAL

Advice, suggestions, and information

- Receiving advice about a product from a friend
- A doctor giving you tips to improve your physical health



TANGIBLE

Concrete assistance

- A family member helping you out financially
- When a friend gives you a ride after your car breaks down

There are four types of social support: Emotional, appraisal, informational, and tangible. Emotional, appraisal, and informational support are all forms of mental and emotional support and tangible support is practical support.

Emotional support is expressed as empathy, love, trust, and caring. This kind of support helps a person feel emotionally safe enough to be vulnerable. It can look like close friends and family members providing comfort, through words or giving hugs or having someone who can listen to your problems.

Appraisal is information that is useful for self-evaluation and helps build self-esteem. When you give someone this kind of support, you are helping them think and evaluate not by providing new information but by asking questions and considering their values. Examples of this include a friend offering you words of encouragement or a therapist helping you recognize your strengths.

Informational support is any advice, suggestions, or facts that can help a person overcome a challenge. This kind of support looks like receiving advice about a product from a friend or even a doctor giving you tips to improve your physical health.

Tangible is concrete assistance and taking on responsibilities for someone else so they can deal with a problem. A family member helping you out financially or a friend giving you a ride after your car breaks down are examples of what this kind of support looks like.

HOW TO BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

Dedicating adequate time to building relationships is an important part of achieving balance. Spending too much time socializing can detract from responsibilities, but spending too little time may make it harder to feel supported. Finding the right balance between school, work, and socializing is an important part of establishing a positive support network.



TIPS ON GETTING STARTED

- Identify your needs to determine the kind of support you require (emotional support, practical assistance, advice, or a combination of these).
- Assess and cultivate existing relationships, think about who you're comfortable with.
- Seek support groups or communities that focus on topics or issues that are relevant to you, whether it's online or in person.

Here's how to get started: First, identify your needs and determine the kind of support you require. Ask yourself if you need emotional support, practical assistance, advice, or a combination of these. Doing so will help you identify who to go for support.

Assess and cultivate existing relationships and think about who you'd be most comfortable asking for different kinds of support. Starting with family and friends is probably easiest if you don't want to start from scratch.

You can also seek support groups or communities that focus on topics or issues that are relevant to you, whether it's online or in person. Social media groups or forums are great places to look for advice or people who share similar life experiences that you can access for free. Joining clubs at school or going to events at a community center are more tangible ways to get connected with people.

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OTHER TIPS



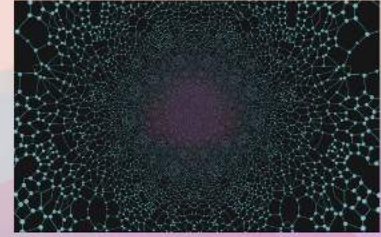
COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS

Express your needs and concerns to your existing relationships. Let them know that you value and are open to receiving their support. Clear communication lets them know how they can support you effectively.



BE A SUPPORTIVE FRIEND

Building a support network is a two-way street. Be there for others and provide support when they need it. By being a supportive and reliable friend, you are more likely to receive support in return.



EXPAND YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLE

Join clubs, organizations, or groups that align with your interests and values. Attend events, workshops, or gatherings where you can interact with people who share similar experiences, challenges, or beliefs.

Some other tips include communicating your needs, being a supportive friend, and expanding your social circle.

If you want someone to support you, you need to express your needs and concerns to your existing relationships. Let them know that you value and are open to receiving their support. Clear communication lets them know how they can support you effectively.

It's also important to remember that building a support network is a two-way street. Be there for others and provide support when they need it. By being a supportive and reliable friend, you are more likely to receive support in return.

If you want to make your support network bigger, join clubs, organizations, or groups that align with your interests and values. Attend events, workshops, or gatherings where you can interact with people who share similar experiences, challenges, or beliefs. Remember, these can be either online or in person.

SUPPORTING OTHER PEOPLE



The best way to support people in your life is to simply ask how you can be supportive and listen to their needs. Here's general advice on how to support someone through a difficult time:

- *Validate the person's experience to let them know you understand what they're going through.*
- *Avoid judgment and don't offer constructive criticism or advice (unless it's asked).*
- *Instead of trying to say the perfect thing, just be authentic and say what feels natural and genuine.*
- *Build them up with relevant compliments about their strengths.*

The best way to support the people in your life is to simply ask how you can be supportive and listen to their needs but here's some general advice on how to support someone through a difficult time:

Validate the person's experience to let them know you understand what they're going through.

Use empathetic phrases like “this must be a challenging time for you” or “I can see why this would upset you”

Avoid judgment and don't offer constructive criticism or advice (unless it's asked).

Don't tell the person where they went wrong

If they do ask for advice, still try to be gentle

Instead of trying to say the perfect thing, just be authentic and say what feels natural and genuine.

Trying to say the perfect thing could come across as insincere

An authentic expression of concern will mean much more than a response devoid of true feeling

Build them up with relevant compliments about their strengths.

If they're feeling bad about a mistake they made at work, remind them of their successes

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Boundaries

Self-care

SUPPORTING OTHER PEOPLE



- Support their solutions instead of pointing out flaws to their plan.
- Although it's okay to share a similar experience, don't compare their situation to worse situations or say that it could be a lot worse since it can come across as minimizing their feelings and experience.
- If the situation is right, offer physical contact, like a hug.
- Do something nice for them, like buying them a treat or running an errand for them.
- Plan a distracting activity, like watching a movie.
- Check in with them; revisiting the topic lets them know their troubles matter to you even though you don't have any active involvement.

Support their solutions instead of pointing out flaws to their plan, even if you don't agree with how they're planning to go about it

Unless they ask for advice or their plan sounds risky or dangerous

Although it's okay to share a similar experience, don't compare their situation to worse situations or say that it could be a lot worse since it can come across as minimizing their own feelings and experience.

If the situation is right, offer physical contact, like a hug.

Do something nice for them, like buying them a treat or running an errand for them.

Plan a distracting activity, like watching a movie.

Check in with them; revisiting the topic lets them know their troubles matter to you even though you don't have any active involvement.

BOUNDARIES

Offering a helping hand is an important part of maintaining good relationships. However, saying “yes” to every request people make of you can leave you feeling depleted and resentful. Here's how to set healthy boundaries about supporting other people:



Setting boundaries:

- Give yourself permission to put your needs first without feeling guilty.
- Make a list of values that matter most to you, which will help guide you towards creating good boundaries.
- Think about what you don't want to compromise on. Based on your list of values, consider if there's anything you're not comfortable doing or any issues you refuse to budge on. These are your personal boundaries.
- Identify any situations that make you feel resentful or overwhelmed. This will protect you from burnout or feeling like people are taking advantage of you.
- Remember that it's okay for others to set boundaries with you too.

Offering a helping hand is an important part of maintaining good relationships. However, saying “yes” to every request people make of you can leave you feeling depleted and resentful. Here's how to set healthy boundaries about supporting other people:

Give yourself permission to put your needs first without feeling guilty.

In order to give your best self to people in your life, you need to take care of your needs first and you can't do that if you're constantly putting everyone's needs before your own. Make a list of values that matter most to you. This will help guide you towards creating good boundaries.

Think about what you don't want to compromise on. Based on your list of values, consider if there's anything you're not comfortable doing or any issues you refuse to budge on. These are your personal boundaries.

Identify any situations that make you feel resentful or overwhelmed. This will protect you from burnout or feeling like people are taking advantage of you.

Remember that it's okay for others to set boundaries with you too.

IT'S OKAY TO...

SAY "NO"

If someone asks for support and it's something that you don't think you have the capacity to do or makes you feel uncomfortable, it's okay to just say no and offer an alternative method of support.

MAKE EXCEPTIONS

It's also okay to tell someone if the support you're giving is a one-time thing, especially with tangible support, like giving someone a ride or lending them money, but make sure you communicate this boundary either before or immediately after.

END SUPPORT

You can also end support whenever it feels appropriate as you are not obligated to continue giving support to someone, especially if it's impacting your health or other important areas of your life.

When it comes to supporting others and setting boundaries, it's okay to say "no", make exceptions, or end support.

If someone asks for support but it's something that you don't think you have the capacity to do or makes you feel uncomfortable, you can just say no and offer an alternative method of support.

It's also okay to tell someone if the support you're giving is a one-time thing, especially with tangible support, like giving someone a ride or lending them money, but make sure you communicate this boundary either before or immediately after so you don't feel like you're being taken advantage of and so the person doesn't think the support you're offering is something they can regularly depend on.

You can also end support whenever it feels appropriate as you are not obligated to continue giving support to someone, especially if it's impacting your health or other important areas of your life (unless it's your child).

BEING YOUR OWN SUPPORT NETWORK



Self-care is supporting yourself by taking steps to manage stressors and tend to your physical and emotional health needs to the best of your ability so you can help and care for others and do all the things you need and want to accomplish in a day.

It includes everything related to staying physically healthy, including hygiene, nutrition, and seeking medical care when needed. Boundaries are also a form of self-care.

It is not synonymous with self-indulgence or being selfish.

If you don't have a support network or anyone you feel comfortable asking for support yet, you can do things in the meantime to support yourself using self-care. You can use self-care to support yourself and take steps to manage stressors and tend to your physical and emotional health needs so you can help and care for others and do all the things you need and want to accomplish in a day.

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Self-care is not synonymous with self-indulgence or being selfish.

SUPPORTING YOURSELF



- *Take a break from the news, including social media. Hearing about negative events repeatedly can create an unhealthy environment.*
- *Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep.*
- *Make time to relax and unwind or for your hobbies.*
- *Don't push down your feelings and pretend they're not there. What is pushed down must come up and out eventually and too often it's via an inexplicable explosion of emotion, illness, anxiety, or stress.*
- *Fill your life with things that lift you up and remove the things that bring you down.*

Some ways you can support yourself are:

Take a break from the news, including social media. Hearing about negative events repeatedly can create an unhealthy environment.

This is actually something I do regularly. Not reading the news doesn't make you a bad person.

Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. These are all things known to improve mental and physical health.

Make time to relax and unwind or for your hobbies.

Making time to do these things reduces stress and provides a sense of happiness and accomplishment in your life

Don't push down your feelings and pretend they're not there. What is pushed down must come up and out eventually and too often it's via an inexplicable explosion of emotion, illness, anxiety, or stress.

To avoid this, let yourself know that it's okay to have feelings and feel your feelings. Sit with them, examine how they feel in your body, and accept that you have them. Or see a therapist for advice on how to manage uncomfortable feelings. What matters most is how you manage and express those feelings.

Fill your life with things that lift you up and remove the things that bring you down.

BUILD A BETTER SUPPORT NETWORK!

Having a good support network is a vital tool in maintaining your mental health and wellbeing. It has also been shown to reduce stress, promote better coping skills, and lead to a longer, healthier life.



CONCLUSION

- When you start building your support network, think about the kind of support you want and who you could receive that support from.
- Support networks are two-way streets, so don't forget to offer support to those that support you.
- Make sure to set up boundaries with people in your support network so you don't get burnt out.
- Use self-care to support yourself if you don't have a support network in place yet.

Build a better support network!

Having a good support network is a vital tool in maintaining your mental health and wellbeing. It has also been shown to reduce stress, promote better coping skills, and lead to a longer, healthier life.

When you start building your support network, think about the kind of support you want and who you could receive that support from.

Support networks are two-way streets, so don't forget to offer support to those that support you.

Make sure to set up boundaries with people in your support network so you don't get burnt out.

Use self-care to support yourself if you don't have a support network in place yet.

RESOURCES

- <https://slideplayer.com/slide/13276409/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4780285>
- <https://mensline.org.au/mens-mental-health/the-power-of-a-good-support-network>
- <https://mywellbeing.com/therapy-101/how-to-build-a-support-system>
- <https://www.washington.edu/doi/how-can-i-develop-support-network>
- <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/mental-health/how-to-build-a-strong-support-network>
- https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-63135-2_11
- med.upenn.edu/hbhe4/part3-ch9-key-constructs-social-support.shtml?2.0
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/emotional-support>
- <https://www.wikihow.life/Set-Healthy-Boundaries-About-Helping-Others>
- <https://www.wikihow.com/Support-and-Encourage-Yourself>
- <https://thegirlwholovedtowrite.com/2019/05/be-your-own-dang-support-system-today/>
- <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>
- <https://medium.com/the-ascent/when-your-support-network-doesnt-exist-270285f871fe>
- <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/developing-your-support-system.html>
- <https://www.spartanburg7.org/site/Default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&PageID=1&ViewID=6446ee88-d30c-497e-9316-3f8874b3e108&FlexDataID=19831>