

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & FINDING SUPPORT

WHY WE NEED OTHER PEOPLE

Understanding connection as a foundation of wellbeing

RESOURCE 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



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Understanding connection as a foundation of wellbeing

"The quality of your life ultimately depends on the quality of your relationships." — Esther Perel

Human beings are remarkably adaptable.

We can learn new skills, overcome adversity and navigate extraordinary challenges. Yet despite our capacity for independence, one thing has remained consistent throughout history: we have never truly thrived in isolation. From the earliest communities to modern society, our wellbeing has been shaped not only by what we achieve as individuals but also by the relationships we build with others.

Connection is not simply something that makes life more enjoyable. It is one of the foundations of emotional wellbeing. Feeling understood, valued and accepted by another person can influence how we cope with stress, recover from setbacks and experience a sense of belonging. Relationships provide opportunities to celebrate life's successes, but they also offer comfort during times of uncertainty, loss and change.

Many people believe that needing others is a sign of weakness. We often admire independence, resilience and self-sufficiency, encouraging ourselves to cope quietly and solve problems alone. While these qualities have their place, emotional wellbeing is not strengthened by isolation. There is a significant difference between being capable of managing life's challenges and believing that we must always manage them without support.

Relationships come in many forms. For some, connection is found within close family. Others rely on trusted friendships, neighbours, colleagues, community groups or partners. Some people find belonging through volunteering, faith communities, sports clubs or shared interests. There is no single definition of what a supportive relationship should look like because every person's life is different. What matters is not the number of relationships we have but whether there are people with whom we feel safe enough to be ourselves.

Feeling emotionally safe is different from simply being surrounded by others. It is possible to spend time with people every day and still feel profoundly lonely. Equally, a small number of meaningful relationships can provide a deep sense of security and belonging. Emotional connection is built through trust, acceptance and mutual respect. It grows when people feel able to share their thoughts, express their emotions and know they will be met with kindness rather than judgement.

Relationships are also reciprocal. While we often think about receiving support, healthy relationships are built through giving as well as receiving. A simple message asking how someone is doing, offering practical help or listening without trying to fix every problem can strengthen relationships more than we sometimes realise. Small acts of kindness, repeated consistently over time, become the foundations upon which trust is built.

Of course, relationships are not always easy. Misunderstandings occur. People disappoint one another. Life becomes busy and friendships sometimes drift. These experiences are part of being human. Building meaningful relationships is not about avoiding every difficulty; it is about learning how to communicate honestly, repair misunderstandings and remain open to connection even after disappointment.

One of the greatest barriers to building relationships is believing that we have to wait until we feel more confident, less anxious or somehow more interesting before reaching out. Yet meaningful relationships are rarely built because someone appears perfect. They are built because people allow themselves to be

genuine. Authenticity often creates stronger connections than trying to present a carefully polished version of ourselves.

Belonging is not something we earn through achievement.

It grows when we experience acceptance.

Sometimes that acceptance begins with one conversation, one invitation or one person who chooses to listen without judgement. Those moments may seem small at the time, yet they often become turning points in people's lives.

Building relationships is not about collecting as many people as possible. It is about creating connections that allow us to feel seen, heard and valued. It is also about recognising that support is not something reserved for times of crisis. Healthy relationships enrich everyday life. They encourage us when we lose confidence, celebrate with us when life goes well and remind us that our worth is not measured by what we can accomplish alone.

None of us is expected to have every answer.

None of us is expected to carry every burden.

Sometimes the strongest thing we can do is allow another person to walk alongside us for part of the journey.

Take a Moment to Reflect

As you finish reading, you may find it helpful to pause and consider:

Who are the people you feel most comfortable being yourself with?

When was the last time you allowed someone to support you?

Are your relationships built on obligation, or do they also include trust and openness?

Is there someone you could reconnect with this week?

There are no right or wrong answers. These questions are simply an invitation to reflect on the relationships that already exist in your life and the ones you may wish to nurture.

If You'd Like Further Support

Building relationships and asking for support can feel challenging, particularly if you have experienced loneliness, loss or difficult relationships in the past. The following organisations offer different ways of connecting with others.

ANDYSMANCLUB

Free peer-support groups for men aged 18 and over across the UK. Meetings take place every Monday evening, providing a welcoming space where men can talk openly or simply listen.

MenWalkTalk

A charity that brings men together through organised walks, creating opportunities for conversation, friendship and improved wellbeing in a relaxed environment.

Men's Sheds

Community spaces where people build friendships through shared interests, practical activities and a sense of belonging. Many members find that simply being alongside others has a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Samaritans

Available 24 hours a day for anyone who needs someone to listen. You do not have to be in crisis to reach out. Sometimes speaking to someone who will listen without judgement is an important first step.

NHS Talking Therapies

If loneliness, anxiety or low mood are making it difficult to build or maintain relationships, your local NHS Talking Therapies service may be able to offer evidence-based psychological support.

A Closing Reflection

Relationships are not built through perfection.

They are built through presence.

Through listening.

Through kindness.

Through allowing ourselves to be known, little by little, by people who meet us with acceptance and respect.

The path towards stronger relationships rarely begins with a life-changing moment.

More often, it begins with a single conversation.