

WHAT WORD COMES TO YOUR MIND?

Look at the partial word below and notice what arrives first. Try not to search for the intended answer straight away. Your first association may tell you something interesting about what is present for you today.

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What came to mind first?

What did your response seem to connect with?

NOW REVEAL THE WORD

CONNECT

Connection is more than simply being around other people. We can be surrounded by people and still feel unseen, or spend time alone while feeling deeply connected. Connection involves being able to experience some degree of recognition, safety, mutuality or belonging.

This reflection looks at connection with other people, with yourself and with the parts of life that give you a sense of meaning.

WHAT DOES CONNECTION FEEL LIKE?

There is no single correct way to connect. Some people thrive in groups; others connect most deeply one-to-one, through shared interests, online communities, animals, nature, creativity or simply being alongside somebody without pressure to talk.

I feel most able to be myself when...

I feel genuinely seen or understood when...

I tend to disconnect or withdraw when...

The kind of connection I need more of is...

Connection does not require constant availability

Healthy connection can include space. Needing quiet, recovery time or clear limits does not mean you do not care. Sustainable relationships allow people to have different capacities and communication needs.

Belonging without masking

Sometimes we gain social acceptance by hiding needs, rehearsing responses, copying expected behaviour or making ourselves easier for others to manage. Consider where you experience connection that allows more of your real self to be present.

BUILDING MEANINGFUL CONNECTION

Connection often grows through repeated small moments rather than one dramatic conversation. Choose steps that respect your energy, boundaries and preferred ways of communicating.

Someone I would like to feel more connected with:

One small way I could reach towards connection:

Something I wish I could ask for more clearly:

A boundary that would make connection feel safer:

One way I could reconnect with myself:

A connection experiment

Choose one low-pressure action this week: send a message, share something genuine, ask somebody how they really are, attend a familiar group, sit with somebody without needing to fix anything, or make time for an activity that reconnects you with yourself.

If connection feels difficult

Past rejection, trauma, bullying, misunderstanding, sensory overload, social anxiety or repeated experiences of not fitting in can make connection feel risky. Moving slowly is valid. Safety and trust are built through experience; they do not have to be forced.

A MESSAGE FROM MAGGIE

Connection does not have to look like having a huge circle of friends or being comfortable in every social situation. Sometimes one person who really listens can matter more than a room full of people.

I also think it is important that we do not ask people to connect by becoming less like themselves. If belonging requires constant masking, silence about your needs or ignoring your boundaries, it can leave you feeling more alone rather than less.

Connection can begin very quietly: an honest message, a shared interest, sitting beside somebody, allowing yourself to be helped, or noticing that you do not have to explain every part of yourself to be worthy of care.

If this reflection shows you that you are missing connection, try not to turn that into another criticism of yourself. Let it become information about something you may need.

Maggie Learoyd MNCPS - Space to Breathe Therapy

THERAPEUTIC CONTEXT & FURTHER READING

Person-centred therapy places the quality of relationship at the centre of therapeutic work, including empathy, acceptance and authenticity. Attachment theory explores how relational experiences can influence expectations of closeness and safety, while research on loneliness and belonging highlights the importance of meaningful social connection for wellbeing.

Suggested reading: Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*; John Bowlby, *A Secure Base*; Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*; Vivek H. Murthy, *Together*.

This resource is for reflection and psychoeducation. It is not a diagnostic tool or a substitute for individual medical or mental-health care.