



## Improve Relationships and Build Support Networks [part 1]

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Building a support network is like having a safety net beneath a high-wire act. Here's the thing: life's unpredictable, and while we all love those moments of triumph, it's the stumbles that remind us of how vital it is to have a solid foundation.

Most of us learned through trial and error how important exercise, nutrition and, preventative check-ups are for our health. Did you know that friendship is just as important?

Research shows that people who have healthy relationships have less physical and mental illness than people who are socially isolated. They also tend to live longer. One study of 7,000 adults in California showed that those with close ties to family, friends and community had less heart disease, cancer, strokes, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, and substance abuse problems.

The combination of involvement, caring relationships, and actively seeking friendship is what psychologists call "social support." The people who you are close to form your "social support network."

This article will help you learn a set of skills which will improve your social support network. Some of these skills come naturally to you and some you will have to work at. No one is an "expert" in relationships. We are all learning as we go. So be gentle on yourself and consider relationship enhancement as a life-long process.

From the list below take a look at who is part of your support network and who you would like to exclude. Some individuals can fit more than one category:

- Parents/Relatives \_\_\_\_\_
- Spouse or significant other \_\_\_\_\_
- Old friends \_\_\_\_\_
- New friends \_\_\_\_\_
- People who make me feel good \_\_\_\_\_
- People who make my life easier \_\_\_\_\_
- People I turn to in times of trouble \_\_\_\_\_
- People I turn to in times of joy \_\_\_\_\_
- People who support me being healthy or talented \_\_\_\_\_
- People who are uncomfortable with me being healthy or talented \_\_\_\_\_
- People who are downers \_\_\_\_\_