



Plugging In: Finding the Fit



Feeling compassion for (and being of service to) others has health benefits *and* creates a sense of connection and shared purpose.

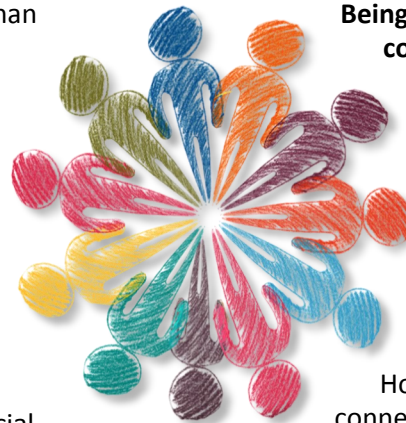
Here are some tips to help you find the best place for you to “plug in.”

1. **Know what you have to offer.** What skills do you bring that could best be applied to an organization’s mission? What feels important and inspires you to contribute? Look for places and projects that are in that “sweet spot” of what you’re good at doing, what you care about, and what your community needs.
2. **Be clear on what you want to do.** Are you looking for a place to apply a specific skill set? Or are the specific tasks less important than what the group is working towards? Understanding what this distinction means for you will help ensure a good match.
3. **Have an interview before you sign up to help.** Check out [RSVP](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment/encorps/interviewing-questions) (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) for tips on asking the best questions to ensure the best fit. www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment/encorps/interviewing-questions
4. **Be realistic about your availability.** Communicate these limits clearly from the start and stick to them. This will help volunteering to be a joy, instead of becoming a drain.
5. **Start small.** Commit to a short-term project first. Then, if it worked well for everyone, you can take on more. If not, you can politely move on and try another organization.

Creating Community

Why We’re Better Together.

A community is more than people sharing the same zip code. Feeling a sense of connection to the place we live, and to the people that live there with us, benefits us - individually and collectively.



Being part of a supportive community helps us to:

- feel better about ourselves,
- be more empathic to others,
- be more trusting and cooperative in our relationships with other people.

Dangers of Disconnection

The negative impacts of social isolation are wide-ranging. Loneliness:

- Increases the likelihood of death by 26%.
- Is associated with the risk of developing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and disability in general.
- Puts people at a greater risk for cognitive decline, dementia, and depression.
- Can fuel antisocial behavior that can lead to increasing isolation.

Benefits of Belonging

Luckily, the benefits of feeling connected are just as extensive. In general, connected people have:

- Longer lives,
- Stronger immune systems,
- Lower levels of anxiety and depression,
- Faster recovery from disease and injury.

Taking care of ourselves can
take a lot of support.
We’re here to help!
Ask a nurse or provider
if you’d like to talk.

However, a sense of connection isn’t determined by the number of friends that we have or how many groups to which we belong. Introverts and people that like to be by themselves can still experience feeling of connection. Just like it’s possible to feel isolated even when we’re in a crowd, it’s possible to feel connected even when we’re alone.

While being active in “Creating Community” has health benefits, we need to make sure that we take care of ourselves while we’re taking care of others. Make sure that you’re:

- Eating a balanced, nourishing diet.
- Finding time to be physically active in ways that you enjoy.
- Getting enough sleep and mental down-time.
- Asking for help when you need. Most often, people are more than willing to help, but if we don’t ask, they assume we don’t need assistance.

When we take good care of ourselves, we’re better able to take good care of others.

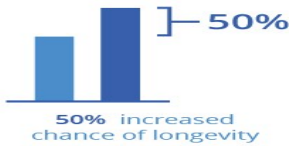
If you want to go quickly - go alone.
If you want to go far - go together.
-African Proverb

WHAT IS SOCIAL CONNECTION?



The subjective experience of feeling close to and a sense of belongingness with others.

THE BENEFITS OF HIGH SOCIAL CONNECTION:



stronger gene expression for immunity (research by Steve Cole, UCLA)

lower rates of anxiety and depression

higher self-esteem and empathy

better emotion regulation skills

Social connection creates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well being.

THE DANGERS OF LOW SOCIAL CONNECTION

worse for health than smoking, high blood pressure or obesity

higher inflammation at the cellular level

higher susceptibility to anxiety and depression

slower recovery from disease

increased antisocial behavior and violence

suicide

HOW MUCH SOCIAL CONNECTION DO AMERICANS HAVE?

Loneliness, isolation and alienation are on the rise.

In 2004, 25 % of Americans claim that they have no one to share a personal problem with.

Loneliness is the main reason why people seek psychological counseling.

HOW CAN I INCREASE MY SOCIAL CONNECTION? I'M AN INTROVERT, A LONER OR HAVE NO FRIENDS. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

No problem! All the benefits mentioned above have nothing to do with how many friends you have. The benefits come from your internal and subjective sense of connection!

As long as you feel connected to others on the inside, you still get the benefit of being connected. Think of children who run up to play with children they don't know, they feel connected from within.

An internal sense of connection can be nurtured and built:

1) Give, Share, Support & Do acts of service and kindness for others.
Research shows that compassion and volunteering has huge health benefits and creates a sense of connection and purpose. Research also shows that if we need help, we should ask for it. It will create belonging for those we ask.

2) Take care of oneself:
Stress is linked to high self-focus and therefore a lower sense of connection; if you are happy from within, you are also more likely to feel connected, to reach out to others, and to make the world a happier and sunnier place.

3) Ask for help.
Research shows that people are willing to help us but if we don't ask, they assume we don't need help. Reach out to those around you. Sad to be spending Christmas alone? Ask if you can join friends or invite others to join you!