

Building a Support System

You don't have to go through recovery alone. When you're living with depression, addiction, or another mental health condition, it can feel easier to pull away from people. Building a support system of caring, trustworthy people can make a real difference. These are the family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and acquaintances who make it easy for you to be yourself.

Even though reaching out might feel hard, isolation can worsen your condition. The less you connect, the harder it becomes to re-engage. A strong support system helps interrupt that cycle, and can offer encouragement, accountability, and help you challenge negative thoughts.

Benefits of a support system

Research shows that a network of socially supportive people offers:

- **Accountability.** Sharing your goals with someone else helps you stay on track and encourages them to do the same.
- **Better physical and emotional health.** Supportive relationships promote healing and resilience.
- **Better problem-solving skills.** Talking through challenges with others can spark new ways of thinking.
- **Enhanced brain fitness.** Social activities, such as joining a book club or participating in a sports team, keep your mind active and engaged.

Building your circle of support

At first, it might feel uncomfortable to ask for help. That's okay. You don't have to tell everyone about what you're going through. Who you confide in is your choice.

When building your support network, think about:

- **Who to include.** Choose people who are kind, understanding, and not judgmental. Try to avoid those who are overly critical or dismissive of you. If your network feels small, that's okay. It can start with your health care team or therapist.
- **Where to connect.** Some people feel comfortable in formal settings, like a support group led by a professional, while others prefer casual gatherings with close friends.
- **Whether to involve coworkers.** Every workplace is different. Even with growing awareness, stigma about mental health remains common. It often comes from fear or a lack of understanding about what mental health truly means. Share only what feels safe and appropriate for you.
- **How to stay involved.** Participate in activities that bring you joy, such as volunteer programs, recreational groups, faith-based communities, or classes. Staying engaged gives you a sense of connection and purpose.

For more mental health educational resources, visit depressioncenter.org/toolkit.

This document provides general educational information developed by the Eisenberg Family Depression Center. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your health care provider if you have questions about your health or treatment options.