

Social support and social connectedness

Nicoletta Crollini

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WHAT IS SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social supports are the network of friends, family and other people who you turn to in times of need or crisis. The help one can access through their social supports can be both practical and emotional support.

WHY HAVING A SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK IS IMPORTANT

Having a social support network is incredibly important to maintaining our physical and mental wellbeing. Research has shown that having high-quality social supports in our lives can improve our resilience skills and decrease the impacts of trauma-related mental health issues. Social supports help to enhance our quality of life, providing a buffer to manage and overcome adverse life events.

HOW TO BROADEN YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK - IT IS NEVER TOO LATE

Most people already have an established social support network through their family and friends. As we progress through life, our circumstances may change and so may our social support networks. I thought it might be useful to list a few stages in life and the avenues in which we can explore meeting new people and potentially developing new social support networks.

Please note that a majority of the organisations provided also tend to have online/virtual social groups and activities available.

Bleeding Disorders Community

Your local Haemophilia Foundation – find your state/territory Foundation contact details on the HFA website – www.haemophilia.org.au

This is your opportunity to connect with the bleeding disorders community and develop a support network that understands what it is like to have a bleeding disorder or be the parent, carer and loved one of a person with a bleeding disorder.

General local council - Either call or visit your local council's website to learn about the various social groups and events run by your local council that promote social connectedness and social support.

New parents, carers and babies

Certainly, being a new parent is a different experience. It can be a challenging time for some to navigate and socially isolating at times. There are a range of groups and supports people can access as new parents or carers. Here are a couple:

Your local playgroup - access the Playgroups Australia website to find your nearest playgroup - playgroupaustralia.org.au

Playgroups provide parents and carers the opportunity to get together with their young children for a couple of hours each week to connect, learn through play and have fun. Playgroup is one of the first social networks for children and families.

Local parent support services – visit the Raising Children website and look under GROWN UPS > SERVICES & SUPPORT > LOCAL SERVICES - raisingchildren.net.au

You may have specific parenting networks in your state or territory, where you can access a parenting advice, support and connect with other parents through a range of groups. For example, in NSW there is Karitane - www.karitane.com.au

Children and young people

For kids and young people, making new friends is very personal, due to their unique personalities, emotional skills and social skills. Preschool and school are environments where children and young people tend to develop most of their friendships. However, there certainly are a range of other avenues where children and teenagers can make new friends and develop their social support network.

Local community sports and activities – information regarding these can be accessed through schools and via your local council website.

PCYC – is an organisation that aims to support young people reach their potential through a range of activities and groups which are fun, safe and friendly. There are local PCYC clubs across Australia. You can find your local club and what activities they offer by searching for PCYC on the internet.

Adults

Most adults tend to have their own established social support networks, but there are plenty of options available to make new friends. Funnily enough, most dating apps now have a friendship section, where you can match with new friends. There is also a specific app/website dedicated to making new friends and joining new social groups called MeetUp.

You can also join a local sporting team, a local club or a workout group like yoga. I joined both a local touch footy team and a yoga class recently. They both have certainly increased my feeling of social connectedness and physical activity levels.

Older People

Maintaining social supports and social connectedness in our older age is extremely important. There is plenty of research outlining the many physical and mental health issues impacted by social isolation. Fortunately, the importance of maintaining social connectedness to reduce social isolation experienced by older people has been recognised as serious issue. There are a number of ways older people can develop social support networks.

My Aged Care - for access to formal social support services, for example the Community Visiting Scheme, which is a service matching socially isolated individuals with volunteer visitors - www.myagedcare.gov.au

My Aged Care can also link socially isolated older people to their local community transport services, which tend to run regular social group outings.

University of the Third Age (U3A) – there are many U3A networks across Australia. You can find your local U3A and the courses they offer through the U3A online website - www.u3aonline.org.au

U3A offers a range of stimulating courses for retired or semi-retired people who enjoy learning and meeting like-minded people. There are no previous learning requirements, no exams and no awards at the end of a course. U3A is an opportunity to keep stimulated and meet interesting people while you continue to learn.

Carers

Carers are also at a higher risk of social isolation. Maintaining social connectedness and social support networks is very important for carers to reduce instances of social isolation.

Your local Carers association – find your state/territory Carers association on the Carers Australia website – www.carersaustralia.com.au

Carers associations are organisations that support all carers who are looking after individuals with support needs relating to ageing, disability, health and mental illness. Local Carers associations run a range of carer support groups and networks.

Do not to forget to reach out and maintain contact with your current social support networks. New jobs, study, raising a family, poor health and even a pandemic can slow down your ability to maintain connectedness with your close friends and family. Maintaining contact with your social support network is still really important and can be as simple as a text message, a phone call/video call, catching up for a walk or doing something a little more special like a lunch or dinner out.

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Nicoletta Crollini is Haemophilia Social Worker at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, NSW
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