

Loneliness and connection

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Maybe if everyone started asking their neighbour for an egg when they're one short to make a cake, we'd all feel a little bit better...

I remember seeing an activity in a self-help book about connection, with sections for friends, family, work, and community, but community really stumped me. I could list people/groups for the other sections, but I didn't really feel like I was a part of any communities, or at least not close. Later that year I attended the National Suicide Prevention Conference, and there was one consistent message that really stuck with me - **SOCIAL COHESION** is the BIGGEST protective factor against suicide.

If you've struggled with your mental health, chances are you've probably felt lonely. Mental health challenges can often feel isolating and like no one else understands you or has the same experience as you. I used to think that loneliness was a more situational issue, like you felt lonely if your friends hung out without you. But I think loneliness grows from deeper within society. I think loneliness is about people not feeling like they have a safe space to be themselves. It's about societal 'norms' and stigma and discrimination and inequality. I think we've become a lonely society and that makes me sad...

While I wish I could eliminate mental health stigma and give everyone a house and a hot meal with the flick of a switch, I do have some suggestions that might help you build a sense of **COMMUNITY** and **CONNECTION**.



Ways to build community and connection

Chat with the person sitting next to you at the local cafe



Learn the names of the people who work at places you regularly visit

Join (or start) a community garden



Start a recurring tradition, no matter how small (eg. Buy a cake on the last weekend of every month and celebrate a small win for each of your friends/family members)

Ask a neighbour for an ingredient if you ran out and then share some of your baked goods



Ask to borrow a tool instead of buying one

Compliment a stranger's outfit, hair, shoes, make up etc.



Attend the same thing often enough that people recognise you

Do something that you have to do anyways but with friends



Organise a potluck instead of going out for dinner

Start volunteering



Go to free local community events



HOBBIES

Find a community of people who have a shared interest (plus you've always got a conversation starter). Maybe you love worm farms... check out your local community gardens -> find one with a worm farm -> find who runs it -> bam you just made a worm farm community! Local library or council websites can be a good starting point, as well as websites like [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk), which you can filter to search for free, local events by category.



I know some of those things might seem strange or daunting, and that's ok! You don't have to like all (or any) of the suggestions – it's about finding what works for you. If you're not sure what things make you feel good, you could try tracking certain information like your mood or how connected you feel. Tracking (also called outcome monitoring) can be done in whatever way works for you, including on your phone. Check out the Minding Your Mind app which is now available to download from the app store to track different types of information and look after your mental health.

 [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD FROM THE APPLE STORE](#) OR

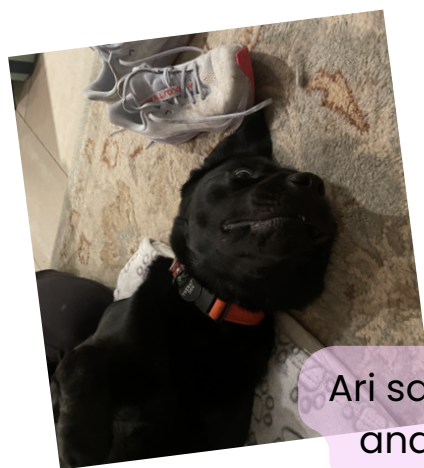
 [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD ON GOOGLE PLAY](#)

It's amazing what a difference a few of these little things can make to how socially connected you feel. I got a dog about two months ago and a few times a week at roughly the same time, I take him to the park. Within just a few weeks I've already found a sense of community among the other dogs and owners.

Best of luck as you venture out!
Don't forget to be bold and enjoy yourself,
Zoe



Ari
(my new doggo)



Ari says be crazy
and enjoy life

