

# Social Connection and Mental Health

Social connection plays an important role in mental health, but its meaning and importance vary between individuals. This leaflet explains how social connection can support wellbeing, and why difficulties with connection are common during periods of mental illness.

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## Why Social Connection Matters

Supportive social connection can:

- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Improve mood and emotional regulation
- Support recovery and resilience
- Provide practical and emotional support

Connection does not require constant socialising or large networks.

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## Mental Illness and Social Withdrawal

Many mental health conditions can lead to:

- Reduced energy for social interaction
- Increased anxiety in social situations
- Loss of confidence
- Desire for isolation or quiet

Social withdrawal is often a **symptom of illness**, not a lack of interest in others.

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## Connection Looks Different for Everyone

Social connection can include:

- One close relationship
- Family contact
- Friends or peers
- Work or study relationships
- Online or community-based connection

Quality of connection often matters more than quantity.

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## When Social Interaction Feels Hard

During periods of distress, social interaction may:

- Feel overwhelming
- Increase fatigue
- Trigger anxiety or self-criticism

It is okay to reduce social demands temporarily while recovering.

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## The Balance Between Isolation and Overwhelm

Both extremes can be challenging:

- Complete isolation can worsen low mood and anxiety
- Too much social demand can increase stress

Recovery often involves finding a **balanced middle ground**.

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## Gentle Reconnection

Helpful approaches to rebuilding connection may include:

- Starting with brief or low-pressure contact
- Choosing familiar or supportive people
- Setting clear time limits
- Allowing flexibility to change plans

Small steps can help rebuild confidence.

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## Social Connection and Trauma

After trauma, relationships may feel unsafe or unpredictable.

Trauma can affect:

- Trust
- Emotional closeness
- Tolerance of intimacy

Pacing and choice are essential when reconnecting with others.

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## **Social Anxiety and Connection**

Anxiety can:

- Increase fear of judgement
- Lead to avoidance
- Reduce enjoyment of interaction

Support and treatment can help reduce anxiety and expand social comfort over time.

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## **Online and Community Connection**

For some people, connection may come from:

- Online communities
- Shared-interest groups
- Structured activities

These forms of connection can be meaningful and valid.

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## **Supporting Social Connection During Recovery**

Helpful strategies may include:

- Scheduling limited, predictable contact
- Combining social interaction with routine activities
- Communicating needs and boundaries clearly

Connection should support recovery, not drain it.

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## **When Social Relationships Are Stressful**

Not all relationships are helpful.

It may be appropriate to:

- Set boundaries

- Reduce contact with stressful relationships
- Focus on emotionally safe connections

Quality and safety matter.

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## Discussing Social Difficulties in Treatment

Social functioning is an important part of mental health care.

It can be helpful to discuss:

- Isolation
- Relationship stress
- Social anxiety

These discussions support more holistic treatment planning.

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## Summary

Social connection can support mental health, but needs and capacity vary widely. Gentle, flexible, and safe connection—at your own pace—often supports recovery more effectively than pressure to socialise.

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