

CULTIVATING

Meaningful Connections



Social connection is important. **It supports a healthy state of well-being.** Attracting relationships that are right for you can **strengthen your identity, increase your motivation** and help **you better live your purpose.**

Science reveals that the happiest people have the richest and most satisfying relationships. Connection is important and it's right up there with satisfying our most basic needs for survival. However, this is not to be mistaken with quantity over quality.



A book review in a 2016 publication of *Comparative Psychology for Clinical Psychologists and Therapists* reveals that it's the quality of your connections that contributes towards your happiness than having a multitude of friendships/relationships. Social connection is necessary for experiencing a more

a happier life, but your relationships don't have to be based on friendship as long as a meaningful connection has been established.

THRIVING RELATIONSHIPS

In a 2015 paper published in, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, researchers, Brooke Feeney and Nancy Collins created a model that identifies thriving relationships having two contexts associated to them*:

- 1. Adversity support** - buffering individuals from the negative effects of stress and assisting in the reconstruction process (motivating and problem solving).
- 2. Relational support** - promoting full participation in life opportunities for exploration, growth, and personal achievement.

DEVELOPING CONNECTIONS

Feelings of connection increase motivation, improve your mood and make you feel happy. It's important to have positive connections with: your colleagues, close family members and friends and people in your community. It can help boost your productivity and growth throughout your life.

When you can successfully apply your values and boundaries towards your relationships, there's a meaningful connection. Knowing about *Aristotle's 3 types of friendships* can be of benefit to you because you can better distinguish between the types of relationships you have with people by identifying which ones are the most meaningful:

FRIENDSHIPS OF VIRTUE ARE RARE, THIS IS WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO BECOME VIRTUOUS TO YOURSELF BEFORE YOU CAN OBTAIN IT

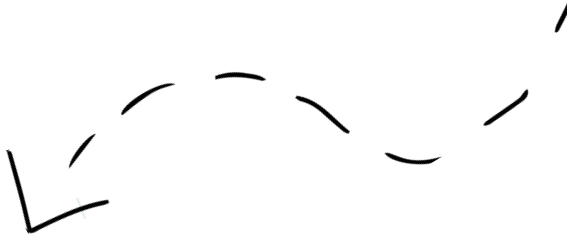
- **Utility** - based on mutual usefulness. This is the most common type of relationship mainly due to the benefits each person has to offer to each other. For example, be-friending a colleague so you both can carpool to work together.
- **Pleasure** - friendships that are based on enjoyment of a shared activity. This can be the person who is your spotting buddy at the gym, but you may never invite to your house for dinner.
- **Friendship of virtue** - people that you share same sets of values with; people that motivate you to become a better person; people that care about you and you care about them. These types of relationships are rare. Today, science points out that you only need 3-4 close friends to experience great life satisfaction, (*Suzanne Degges-White Ph.D.*).

Friends based on utility and pleasure are usually in higher numbers; however, they aren't long-lasting. As you grow, your interests are always changing. It may take time to develop virtuous friendships because these types of relationships are the most aligned with your core values and beliefs. Aristotle believed that before this type of friendship could flourish, you must take the time to understand and honour yourself and know your values.

HOW YOUR BODY RESPONDS TO POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

When you're in the company of happy, supportive and caring people your body will let you know. Here are some ways that your body responds to happy moments in the company of others:

- **Emotional** - mirrored neurons reflect back the same happy emotions and expressions that are shared with you. In other words a good mood can have a positive influence on others and also increase motivation.
- **Physical** - relaxes your muscles keeping you in a calm state. Also, your breathing remains controlled and your cardiovascular response is quieted.
- **Physiological** - feelings of pleasure and joy boost your happy hormones: dopamine, oxytocin and endorphins and reduce cortisol levels.
- **Cognitive** - two regions fill up with activity and release dopamine: (1) caudate nucleus (*reward detection and integration of of sensory experiences and the integration of sensory experiences into social behaviour*). (2) ventral tegmental area (*associated with pleasure, focused attention and the motivation to pursue and acquire rewards*), *Richard Schwartz and Jacqueline Olds, Harvard Medical School.*



DO YOU NEED MORE MOOD BOOSTING CONNECTIONS? (IF YOU AGREE WITH MOST OF THESE, YOU MAY JUST NEED TO UPDATE YOUR INNER CIRCLE)

- Your current connections are toxic or exhaustive towards your mental well-being
- There is a misalignment in values amongst you and others
- Your boundaries are frequently crossed
- People only call upon you when they need some TLC
- You haven't differentiated between utility, pleasure and virtuous friends
- You're frequently misunderstood or taken advantage of
- You feel as though you are operating on a whole other frequency from your current connections
- There is a lack of a harmonious balance, i.e. giving and receiving of time, resources, etc.
- You leave a gathering feeling unsettled instead of feeling motivated and happy

10 WAYS TO SPOT A POSITIVE CONNECTION THAT CAN TURN INTO A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP/FRIENDSHIP

#1 When someone appears self-aware and positive and interactions are mainly motivating, honest and uplifting.

#2 Your time and space are valued. It's respected, not demanded and your way of living is understood.

#3 You celebrate each other's successes and aren't jealous of each others accomplishments

#4 Your boundaries are respected. This includes your physical and mental boundaries. Others will be aware of their limits and be respectful of your values.

#5 There is acceptance and the existence of vulnerability that is present. You can be yourself and not feel judged or ridiculed over your thoughts and beliefs.

#6 Resilience and a growth mindset is nurtured. Ideas are exchanged and conversations are based on problem-solving rather than gossiping.

#7 There are mutual benefits, a sense of importance and shared emotions is experienced - inclusivity is developed and it helps to foster a trusting relationship.

#8 Your gatherings generate laughs, smiles and positive body language. You feel at ease and your body feels relaxed.

#9 Increases your competence - nurtures life-long learning, enhances perspectives and points out your strengths.

#10 Healthy conflict is present. Restorative action is taken to resolve conflicts by using objectivity to understand each other's perspectives, views and intentions. This promotes trust and strengthens relational bonds in a positive and non-ambiguous manner.