lifelines



FALL ISSUE

2025

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

800-346-0110

www.Inova.org/eap

STAY CONNECTED TO COMBAT LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

PG: 2

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCER

PG: 3

CULTIVATING A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

PG: 6

HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

PG: 10

Inova™



STAY CONNECTED TO COMBAT LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

As people age, they often find themselves spending more time at home alone. This can affect your health and wellbeing. Learn if you might be at risk and how to stay connected. Help spread the word about staying connected as you age.

Stay connected to combat loneliness and social isolation.

Feeling lonely and being isolated are bad for your health. Loneliness and social isolation are associated with higher rates of depression, a weakened immune system, heart disease, dementia, and early death.[1]

Are you at risk?

Try to stay active and better connected if you

- Live alone or can't leave your home
- Feel alone or disconnected from others
- Recently had a major loss
- Are a caregiver
- Lack a sense of purpose

Ideas for Staying Connected

- **Find an activity that you enjoy or learn something new.** You might have fun and meet people with similar interests.
- **Get moving!** Exercise decreases stress, boosts your mood, and increases your energy.
- **Volunteer.** You'll feel better by helping others.
- **Stay in touch** with family, friends, and neighbors in person, online, or by phone.
- **Consider adopting a pet.** Animals can be a source of comfort and may also lower stress and blood pressure.

Reference

1. Cacioppo, J.T., & Hawkley, L.C. (2009, August 31). Perceived social isolation and cognition. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 13*(10), 447–454.

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute on Aging (NIA). (n.d.). *Stay connected to combat loneliness and social isolation* [Infographic]. Retrieved September 8, 2022, from https://www.nia.nih.gov

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCER



A growing body of research shows how much people are influenced by those around them. Your mood, your eating and exercise habits, whether you smoke, your financial habits, your attitudes toward the environment—all of these and more are influenced by the people you spend time with. In a way, many of the things you think are within your control are subtly influenced by your friends, your family, and the people you work with.

Being aware of those influences could make you feel helpless, as though the decisions you make and the actions you take are not really your own. However, social influence works alongside personal self-determination. You can control how you react to the ways the people around you influence your moods, thinking, and behavior—and just as others influence you, you influence them. That gives you a tremendous opportunity to make positive change. By brightening your mood, improving your health habits, and taking other steps to improve your wellbeing, you can influence the people around you to improve their wellbeing, too.

Your influence can even extend beyond the people you interact with to the people in their social circles. Research suggests that happiness and healthy behaviors can be contagious, with effects seen through up to three degrees of separation—to the friends of your friends' friends. Your positive attitudes and actions could be a force for good affecting dozens, even hundreds of people.

How to Be a Positive Influence on Others

- **Recognize your influence.** The first step in being a positive influencer is to be aware of the effect you have on others. Your happy mood is contagious, but so is your irritability or anger. Your generosity and kindness are contagious, but so are your selfishness and meanness. Your healthy behaviors are contagious, but so are your unhealthy ones.

continued on page 4

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCER



Continued

- **Lead by example.** An influencer is different from an instructor. An influencer "does" rather than "tells." Smile, and the people around you are more likely to smile. Practice self-control with calming techniques, and your calm, thoughtful approach can help others be calm, too. Balance work and personal life in healthy ways, and you become a model for others to follow.
- **Start with yourself.** Be the best version of yourself. Commit yourself to learning, personal growth, self-awareness, self-management, and the skills of tuning in to and caring about the people around you. Take care of your physical and mental health by adopting healthy eating, exercise, and sleep habits and learning ways to manage stress.
- **Share your enthusiasm.** When you learn a new skill or find a new interest that brings you joy, share your enthusiasm so others are tempted to try it, too. When you make positive changes in yourself, don't brag about them, but don't hide them, either. Let others see how you've improved yourself. If they ask, share how you made the change.
- **Be generous and kind.** While personal improvement starts with you, influence comes from being generous to others. Be thoughtful and kind, and others are likely to follow your lead.
- **Demonstrate resilience and creative problem-solving.** Learn ways to bounce back from setbacks by finding opportunities in change and creative solutions to problems. Your positive, resilient attitude can be a model for the people around you.
- **Be welcoming.** Accept and value people for who they are, so they feel welcome in your company. Recognize and appreciate what's unique and special about them.
- **Give compliments.** Notice when someone does something well by giving genuine compliments. Bring positive attention to others so they feel proud of what they've done and who they are. That goes for friends, family, and work colleagues, as well as local businesses and people who provide services to you.
- **Be encouraging**. Notice when someone you know is trying something new or taking steps to make a positive change. Encourage them, show your support, and celebrate their progress. Encourage others to try new activities you think they might enjoy, too, and new ways to approach a personal change.
- **Listen.** When someone you know shares a problem or challenge, listen. Ask questions to understand. Don't judge them or offer solutions without being asked for your advice.

continued on page 5

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCER



Continued

- **Be the one to make others smile and laugh.** Use humor to lighten the mood and help others relax, but never in a mean-spirited way or at the expense of another person. Be comfortable making fun of yourself. Smile to bring smiles to others.
- **Be a connector.** Introduce people who you think might get along, share an interest, or help each other with their complementary skills and abilities. Introduce yourself to your neighbors and find ways to bring neighbors together to get to know and help each other.
- **Be a positive voice.** Look for the positive in any situation and share those positive possibilities and insights with others. Avoid negative talk and gossip and never be a vehicle for passing them along. Don't be a passive bystander to bullying talk or behavior. Stand up to it in safe and appropriate ways.

By being aware of your influence on the people around you and working to be the best version of yourself that you can be, you can help improve the wellbeing of the people you know and love. Your positive influence may be reflected back on you as others become positive influences, too.

For More Information

Christakis, N.A. (2016, November 30). What do we learn from our networks? *Yale Insights*. Retrieved February 6, 2024, from https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-do-we-learn-from-networks

Christakis, N.A., & Fowler, J.H. (2009). *Connected: The surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. New York: Little, Brown Sparks.

Suttie, J. (2020, March 23). Why taking care of your own well-being helps others. *Greater Good Magazine*. Retrieved February 6, 2024, from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_taking_care_of_your_own_well_being_helps_others

---

Morgan, H. (Revised 2024 [Ed.]). *Be a positive influencer* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



CULTIVATING A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

Despite the vast advantages of a healthy workplace culture, new insights from Gallup show that only about a quarter of U.S. employees strongly agree that their organization delivers on its mission and promises, say that they can apply their organization's values to their work, and actually believe in those values.[1] This once again goes back to the employer-employee disconnect driving attrition and toxic workplace environments: When leaders attempt to unite their workplace around a common goal, value, or mission without taking into proper account the needs, concerns, or values of their employees, such efforts ultimately fail.

Instead, the cultivation of a healthy, harmonious workplace culture happens only when everyone in the organization is involved, and not just those at the top. That said, some of the best practices that can help organizations to improve their environment and enhance their workplace culture include those listed below.

Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into Daily Operations

First and foremost, building a healthy work environment and a strong culture requires that organizations reimagine what diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace looks like (or the alternative acronym, EDI). Without ensuring that discriminatory, oppressive, or limiting policies, practices, and biases are absent or disbarred from the workplace (i.e. without ensuring that the workplace is equitable),

continued on page 7



Continued

CULTIVATING A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

toxicity in the workplace will prevail, as will its numerous costs and consequences.[2]

That said, employers need to look beyond diversity recruitment and pivot their focus toward creating a sustainable environment that treats all employees as equals, helps them to reach their full potential, and motivates them to stay. This may include ensuring that all groups present in the workplace (namely, all ages, genders, races, ethnicities, etc.) are accounted and spoken for before any important decision is made, that everyone has a chance to be heard during meetings, that everyone has the same opportunities for growth and promotion within the organization, and that everyone is treated with the same level of respect.

Providing Training Opportunities for Leaders and Managers

While healthy workplace cultures revolve around the equitable treatment and involvement of all members of an organization, establishing that workplace culture starts at the top.[3] How leaders communicate, behave, and defend or explain their behaviors in the workplace inevitably influences employee behavior, sentiment, and their experience at large. That said, many experts on corporate culture underscore the importance of providing training opportunities to teach leaders from all levels of the organization about the signs and characteristics of toxic workplace cultures, the role they play in determining workplace culture, and how they can prevent toxic cultures and, alternatively, foster positive cultures. This includes encouraging leaders to seek out cross-cultural experiences that help them to enhance their awareness of other cultures and really connect with the needs, interests, and values of their employees; allowing them the time and opportunity to help them build key skills, like empathy, active listening, and recognition; and organizing workshops dedicated to teaching leaders how they can be supportive of employees' workplace mental health and wellbeing needs, and be accommodating toward their personal and professional goals

Offering Educational and Professional Development Opportunities

As leaders are trained to be more empathic, inclusive, and accommodating. One of the best ways in which they can show support to their workforce, according to employees, is by offering career-enhancing education and continual development opportunities that tie them to their organization's key missions or purpose, reassures them that their work and talents matter and are valued, and motivates them to look for new and improved ways of contributing to their organization.[4] Research shows that employees who feel as though their employer not only values their work but cares about their long-term career prospects and individual success are likely to feel happier and more secure, creating a culture of celebration instead of cutthroat competition.[5] Some of the most sought-after

continued on page 8



Continued

CULTIVATING A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

professional development opportunities include management and leadership training, certification programs, technical and interpersonal skills training, and employer-subsidized degree programs.[6] By incorporating development opportunities into daily operations, leaders establish an equitable and inclusive culture in which all believe they have the potential to rise to the top, regardless of connections, backgrounds, or other unfair advantages that, when advantageous, perpetuate toxic cultures

Prioritizing Holistic Wellbeing; Implementing Wellness Programs and Flexible Benefits

When employees feel as though their leaders look down on their health and wellness needs as a detriment or burden to the organization, they are more likely to feel detached from their leaders and peers, disinterested in their work, and overall, less committed to their roles and employment with the organization. In fact, a new study has found that the majority of today's workforce (86 percent) would be more likely to leave a job if it did not support their wellbeing, while 83 percent say they are more attracted to organizations that demonstrate a "progressive culture" that cares about workers' holistic health and wellbeing.[7] In order to create such a culture, numerous studies point to the importance of maintaining workers' work-life balance and upholding their "right to disconnect"[8]; prioritizing flexibility and autonomy when designing benefits offerings, such as by offering work-from-home and choose-your-own-hours opportunities, unlimited paid time off (PTO), as well as health and wellness stipends; and incorporating stress-reduction, mindfulness, and meditation practices into the workday. When employees are given the okay to relax, recharge, and recover, they're protected against chronic or excessive stress, which not only improves their performance, but also improves their mood, which in turn creates a happier, more cooperative, and good-natured culture

References

1. Efron, L. (2022, December 14). *Are your company values more than just words?* Retrieved April 28, 2023, from Gallup: https://www.gallup.com/workplace/406418/company-values-words.aspx

2. Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). (n.d.). *Equity, diversity & inclusion: Moving from ideas into action*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.ccl.org/leadership-challenges/equity-diversity-inclusion

3. Bloznalis, S. (2022, August 23). *Workplace culture: What is it and why is it important in 2023?* Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.workhuman.com/blog/workplace-culture

4. Meyer, T. (Updated 2023, February 21). How to encourage employees to pursue professional development. *Business News Daily*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/10092-encourage-professional-development.html

continued on page 9



Continued

CULTIVATING A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

5. Stoltz, R. (2022, October 13). *Toxic work culture: Signs of an unhealthy work environment & how to fix it*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.workhuman.com/blog/toxic-work-culture-environment

6. University of Massachusetts Global. (n.d.). *A closer look at the professional development opportunities employees really want*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.umassglobal.edu/news-and-events/blog/in-demand-professional-development-opportunities

7. Cholteeva, Y. (2023, February 7). Majority of employees would leave jobs without wellbeing support, research finds. *People Management (PM)*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1812503/majority-employees-leave-jobs-without-wellbeing-support-research-finds

8. Bibby, A. (n.d.). *Are you respecting your employees' right to disconnect?* Retrieved April 28, 2023, from https://www.flexjobs.com/employer-blog/employees-right-to-disconnect

This article was excerpted from the Workplace Options (WPO) Blog post, "Tackling Toxic Workplace Environments" at https://www.workplaceoptions.com/tackling-toxic-workplace-environments.

Fournier, E. (2023, April 26). How to cultivate a healthier, happier workplace. In *Tackling toxic workplace environments* (B. Schuette, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO). Retrieved April 28, 2023, from the WPO Blog: https://www.workplaceoptions.com/news-media/blogs



HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

Friendships are the social connections that enrich your life with conversation, comfort, laughter, support, and encouragement. While friendships can also come with disappointment and conflict, good ones help to buffer the effects of setbacks and stress and help you navigate life's challenges.

Some friendships seem to endure with ease. Some fall away as circumstances change—as people move, change jobs, start families, divorce, or shift priorities. Most take some effort to maintain. Making new friends, especially as an adult, can be difficult; however, maintaining good friendships and making new ones is worth the effort—for your quality of life, happiness, and health.

How do friendships and social connections improve your life?

Many of the benefits of friendships and supportive social connections are obvious. They make you feel good and help you through life's ups and downs. Other benefits, especially the powerful effect of social connections on people's physical health, have been discovered through research. Below are some of the ways friendships help to improve your quality of life.

Life Satisfaction and Enjoyment

- Friendships fill a basic human need for company and companionship—for a sense of belonging. Friends are people who talk with one another, share thoughts and experiences, and have meals or coffee together. Without these social connections, people are susceptible to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

continued on page 11



HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

- Good friends make you happier. Friends who listen to, validate the feelings of, and enjoy each other's company are happier. That's true when they are together, but it also carries over as an emotional lift and buffer when they are apart.
- Friendships improve your self-confidence and sense of self-worth. Having friends who appreciate you for who you are and offer praise and reassurance when you're feeling unsure of yourself, strengthens your self-esteem and confidence. Friends like these help you value yourself as a unique individual and remind you how much you have to offer.

Support and Resilience

- Friends offer emotional support. They listen, show empathy, and tell you they care. This is especially important when you are feeling down or lonely.
- Friends challenge negative thinking with different perspectives. They can help you see things from different angles and steer you away from unrealistic and unhelpful patterns of thought.
- Friends provide guidance and help you make decisions in ways that are true to your best self.
- Friends help you cope with tough times—with loss, illness, and hardship. They strengthen your resilience, helping you weather the inevitable down times in life and bounce back.
- Good friends push you to be your best. They encourage you, challenge you, and remind you of your strengths.
- Friends give you the opportunity to help and be compassionate. Caring about other people and demonstrating that care not only helps your friends, but it also helps you. It contributes to your emotional strength and resilience and helps you keep your own worries in perspective.

Help and Information

- Friends provide practical help. That might include help with a move, backup childcare, or a home-cooked meal when you're sick or overwhelmed.
- Friends share information. They alert you to job and learning opportunities, share tips from their own experience, and help you navigate new challenges.

Physical and Mental Health

- People with supportive social networks have less stress. That may be because they don't feel lonely as often or because of the calming, reassuring influence friends have.

continued on page 12



HOW FRIENDSHIPS IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

- Friends encourage healthy behavior. If you have friends who have healthy eating, exercise, and spending habits, you're more likely to adopt those habits as well. It can work the other way, too, though. If you're trying to lose weight, quit smoking, or address a drinking problem, you'll have a better chance of success if you spend time with people who share those goals.
- Having friends can reduce your risk of depression. Several studies have found that the strength of friendships and social networks is linked to lower incidence of depressive symptoms.
- Supportive social connections can improve heart health. People with strong social connections are significantly less likely to experience heart attacks or die from heart disease, according to separate, long-term studies. One reason may be the association of friendships and social support with lower levels of stress.
- The strength of a person's social networks has been linked with other positive health outcomes, too. These include reduced risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke. It can also lead to a longer life. Having friends and a strong social support network has been found to be as powerful an influence on longevity as exercise and not smoking.

Morgan, H. (Revised 2024). *How friendships improve your life* (B. Schuette & Z. Meeker, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.