

Building Steps to Connection

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ExtraCare Charitable Trust

Open Week

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Welcome to
Solihull
Village

- Confidence
- Mobility
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Support Network
- Expectations
- Thinking/Behavioral Habits



Engaged *Lives*



Building Confidence and Community



Extra
How can we keep our community connected?





Week 1

A Vision of Engagement



Week 2

Mobility and Social Networks



Week 3

New Mindsets: Changing Our Thinking



Week 4

Building Resilience



Week 5

Handling Emotional Challenges: Mindfulness



Week 6

Moving Forwards



Social isolation and loneliness in later life are also caused by STEREOTYPES that many people have of older people.



In fact, these are self-fulfilling prophecies.

Research shows that older people who steer clear of negative ageing stereotypes:

- Move faster
- Have better posture and joints
- Are less anxious
- Have lower blood pressure
- Heal quicker
- Perform better on memory tests
- Live longer (7.6 years)

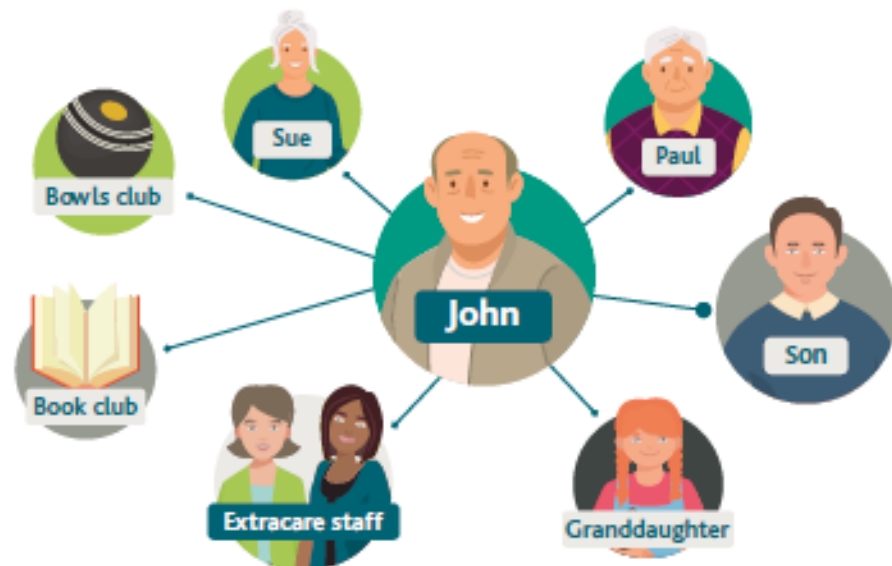


Social Networks

A second foundation for social engagement is a healthy social network.

We all need a set of people we can turn to for interaction and support, when we feel the need. This means we have to keep an eye on our relationships – both the quantity and the quality.

To help us do this, we can map out our current social network.



- How many people do you have regular contact with?
- How meaningful are these relationships?
- Are they satisfying? Are there people you are losing touch with?
- Are there people you would like to know better?

You can be creative, colour-coding your diagram to reflect these things, if you wish.

Interactions don't have to be close or lengthy to be meaningful. Just making a point to speak with the shop attendant, whenever you visit, can slowly build up a valuable and lasting relationship. Try to be vigilant also of other people's relationships. Is there someone you know who is lonely or isolated? Reaching out to them – inviting them to an activity – can help them feel more positive. Doing this, they'll be more likely to invite us to things too.

This kind of positive feedback is the key to maintaining a healthy social network.

Draw your own social network in the space below.

A large rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a social network. In the top right corner of the box, there is a green pencil icon pointing downwards and to the left. In the center of the box, there is a diagram template consisting of a central green box labeled 'Me' with eight lines radiating outwards to small blue dots. Each of these dots is connected to a horizontal dashed line, providing a starting point for drawing connections to other people or groups.



COVID-19: What do we do now?

Reach and support a wider audience...

Steps to Connection

- Interactive
- Reflective exercises
- 10 steps to support a sense of connection

Steps to Connection

A Guide to Finding Community in Older Age

The ExtraCare Charitable Trust
COMMUNITY FUND
Engaged Lives Building Confidence & Community

POSITIVE AGEING: EXPECTING COMMUNITY AND PURPOSE

The "Positive Ageing" movement encourages us to pay greater attention to the beneficial aspects of getting older and the possibilities it holds. Here are just a few things about older age that might surprise you:²



These statistics don't reflect everyone's experience of older age—which is why we've produced this book—but they do show us that a positive time can be just around the corner if we just do a little work to figure out what's in the way. The above also illustrates that ageing should not be thought of as a slow and inevitable decline into becoming a burden. In fact, older people have a **wealth of strengths and skills** that they can (and do) **enjoy putting to use** to make their communities better.

² Unless noted, all statistics here are taken from Robertson, *The ten steps*, chpts. 2-4.
³ University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatGen Social Research, Kantar Public, *Understanding Society: Waves 1-9, 2009-2018 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009*. [data collection]. 12th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614. 2019. <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-13>.

Social Maps

Draw your own social map in the space below. Put yourself in the centre and, around this, add in: (1) people/groups you interact with regularly (2) people/groups who are important to you.



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BONUS STEP Keep Connected During COVID-19
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10 questions to help you reflect:

1. How many people do you have regular contact with? • How satisfying are these relationships?

2. How many different kinds of relationship that fulfil your different needs?

3. Which people on your map that you'd like to strengthen your relationship with? How would you do that? (see overleaf for ideas). • Are there people not on the map that you would like to get to know better? How could you do that?

Ways to Nourish Relationships

Strengthening our connections with others and building up new ones is often simpler than we think. You'd be surprised how just a few small steps can go a long way. Here's a few ideas:

Take the initiative: Don't sit around waiting for invites; extend them yourself. So many people would like to spend time with others but haven't got the confidence to ask. Every healthy community needs people with new ideas and suggestions. You can be one of them.

Be direct: Many older people assume that friends and relatives don't care about them if they don't hear from them much. In fact, others often simply need prompting to express their care because they are too busy to stop and think. If you want to speak with someone more frequently, see what happens if you tell them straight up. People often appreciate this because it helps them know how to support you and can bring purpose to their own lives. Rather than showing weakness, communicating your desires shows you are confident to express what you really feel.

Ask for help: This is a great, often neglected, connection-builder. Volunteering is so popular because people want a chance to give to others, so show them that this opportunity to feel a sense of purpose is right on their doorstep.

Assume the best: How often have you refrained from asking someone how they were doing, or if they'd like your company, because you were worried about being a nuisance? Rather than stewing in such thoughts, assume the best and do so anyway. How else will you know? Reaching out to people makes them feel more positive and more likely to invite us to things too. This kind of positive feedback is key to maintaining a healthy set of relationships.

Appreciate the little things: Interactions don't have to be close or lengthy to be meaningful, so make each one count. Just making a point to speak with the shop attendant, or to enjoy small-talk with people on the bus, often brings a powerful sense of belonging. You might even slowly build up a valuable, lasting relationship by taking the time to enjoy these small social graces.

Show interest in your neighbours: How well do you know the people who live next-door? How about a little further down the street or corridor? When did you last share a cuppa, hear about their children, borrow their garden shears? Most people think it's better to know their neighbours. So introduce yourself. If you pass a neighbour on the street, show a little curiosity about their life. What are they up to? And welcome newcomers. Send them a card. Offer to help them get to know the area. If you're baking something, take some round to share – this simple gesture shows that you're thinking about someone and can lead to sharing much more than food.

Return to your map: Your social circle will evolve as the years go by, so create a new social map every so often to help you understand which relationships need some nourishment.

For further ways to nourish your relationships, you can also read through these sections: **#6 Practice Gratitude** and **#7 Support Others**.

If you'd like to get REALLY practical in nourishing your relationships, read through how to "Set Yourself Goals" at the end of this book, and complete one of the worksheets.



8 FIND COMMUNITY AS A CAREGIVER

Are you spending much of your time caring for a loved one?

Getting older makes it more likely that someone close to us will need our care and support. This person might be a parent, a partner, or even a child, and our life can transform very quickly if we suddenly find ourselves having to support such an individual through a dementia or a serious illness.

Giving ever more time and effort to help a loved one can make our own life seem to shrink in comparison, and it can easily lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, or a lack of understanding from others.

If you find yourself in such a situation, there are many things you can do to retain a sense of community and support for yourself, while you provide care:

- **Find support:** Your friends or relatives may not understand what you're going through. But there are many others who do understand. [Carers' Groups](#) or [Dementia Cafés](#) give you a chance to talk with people in similar situations. Sharing experiences and support with people facing the same challenges as you can bring an unexpected sense of closeness and community.
- **Arrange respite care:** You don't have to do everything yourself. Respite care allows you to focus on your own needs without having to worry about the safety of the person you care for. Friends and family may be able to provide some care duties, and you can access respite services through care agencies or national organisations. Contact Age UK to see how you can arrange this in your area on 0800 678 1602.
- **Keep doing things you enjoy:** Build some time into your caregiving routine for yourself. Focusing on your own wellbeing is an essential component of open-hearted care. Use the time you do have to engage in activities that provide a sense of renewal, whether that be taking a walk with a friend, visiting family, or going to watch a film.
- **Know you don't have to feel guilty:** Many carers feel guilty when they make time for themselves, or when they experience negative emotions (e.g. anger or frustration) towards those they're looking after. But there is no shame in experiencing difficulty, or in taking the time to look after yourself. Being honest about how you feel and what you need is the only way to remain warm-hearted with the care you provide. Taking time to look after yourself is also something your loved one would want you to do, so know that this fulfils their wishes too.



How to access and use?

- A standalone resource (individual use)
- A resource for use as **part of a structured support package**
- If you'd like offer this to your service users / residents, please contact: michael.roberts@extracare.org.uk