

Why Community is Important for Your Mental Health

Wedgwood's Wraparound Team

We're social beings, and we are not meant to live in isolation. Community is critical for us to thrive, especially for someone with mental illness who is already experiencing the common symptoms of loneliness and isolation.

Community provides many elements that are critical to mental health, but here are three of the most beneficial aspects:

1. BELONGING

- If you've ever felt like you don't fit in, you know it can be a lonely experience. Community provides a sense of belonging—a group you identify as being a part of. This is different than conforming to be in a group. A true sense of belonging includes the ability for you to feel you are a part of the community as your true self. There is not anything you have to change to be a part of the community, but instead, you are embraced and appreciated for your unique qualities.

2. SUPPORT

- Who do you turn to when you need something? Having people you can call on when you need to talk or need help with something can help you through difficult situations that might feel insurmountable alone. Knowing there are people who support you can help you feel cared for and safe and can benefit your outlook on life.

3. PURPOSE

- In community, people fill different roles. Perhaps you're the friend who enjoys cooking and can be counted on to bring a hot meal over when someone is going through something. Or you're the friend who others know they can call when they need to talk about their struggles. These roles can give you a sense of purpose through bettering other people's lives. Having purpose, and helping others, helps give meaning to life.

SMALL STEPS TO HELP KIDS PLUG BACK IN AND MOVE TOWARD REAL CONNECTION

Plugging in starts at home with caregivers modeling what healthy connection looks like:

- **Be Present and Available:** Offer 10-20 minutes of daily, uninterrupted time. Put away technology to focus on them, especially during transitions like coming home from school.
- **Practice Active Listening:** Listen without judgment, even when it is difficult, to understand their perspective.
- **Establish Routines and Rituals:** Consistent mealtimes, bedtimes, and special traditions create a sense of security and stability.
- **Show Physical and Verbal Affection:** Use hugs, high-fives, or verbal affirmations to make children feel safe, loved, and valued.
- **Engage in their Interests:** Play their games, read their books, or join their hobbies, even if they seem simple.
- **Validate Emotions:** Acknowledge their feelings—even tantrums—and help them work through emotions rather than just punishing behavior.
- **Follow Through on Promises:** Build trust by keeping your word, such as attending their events.

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Cited from: <https://www.nami.org/blog/the-importance-of-community-and-mental-health/>