




IDEA Conference 2026

The Impact of Social Connection on Health





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Introduction

- New(ish) to Muncie
- 10+ years experience in community - based public health work
- Passionate about building communities where everyone has access to what they need to live a healthy life
- In my current role, I help connect students to the community to share the resources of the college



**Think of a time you felt deeply
connected to others. How did
you feel physically?**





Lacking social connections is as dangerous to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Agenda

01

Introduction

What is social
connection?

02

For Your Health

Health benefits of social
connection

03

Social Infrastructure

Where it happens in your
community

04

Getting Connected

Ways to connect in
Muncie

05

Q&A

Ask me anything!



01

Introduction

What is social connection, anyway?

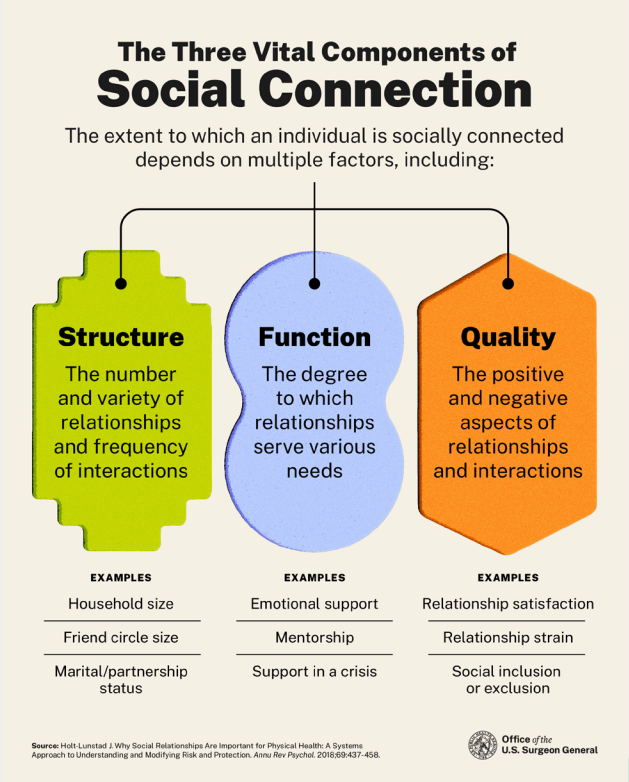


Social Connection

How we relate to and interact with one another

Feeling close and connected to others

Feelings of belonging



Social Connection

- Social connection is dynamic – how connected we are changes over our life course

Factors That Can Shape Social Connection

Individual

- Chronic disease
- Sensory and functional impairments
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Personality
- Race
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Life stage

Relationships

- Structure, function, and quality
- Household size
- Characteristics and behaviors of others
- Empathy

Community

- Outdoor space
- Housing
- Schools
- Workplace
- Local government
- Local business
- Community organizations
- Health care
- Transportation

Society

- Norms and values
- Public policies
- Tech environment and use
- Civic engagement
- Democratic norms
- Historical inequities

Office of the U.S. Surgeon General

Social Disconnection

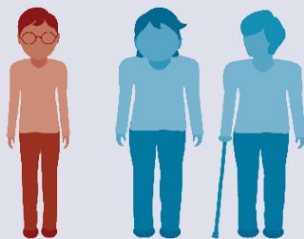
Social Isolation: Having too few roles, relationships, and interactions with others.

Loneliness: distressing feeling when there is a gap between the social connections we have and what we want or need.

Social Disconnection

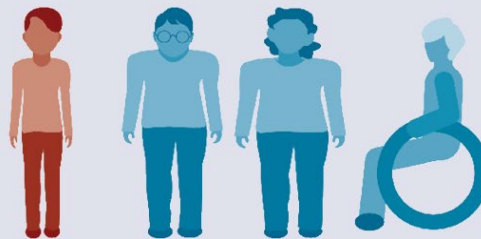
How Common is Lack of Social Connection?

Feeling Lonely



About 1 in 3 adults in the U.S.

Lack of Social & Emotional Support



About 1 in 4 adults in the U.S.

Source: CDC

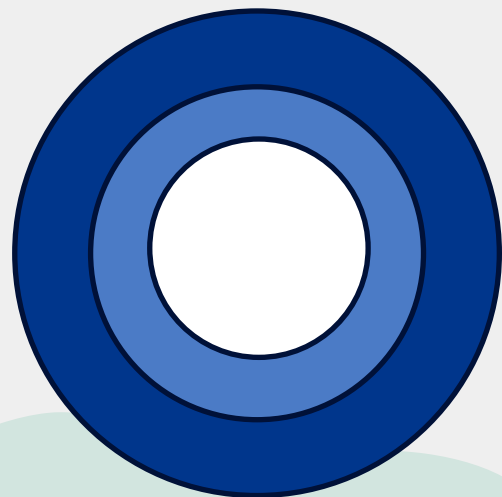
Risk Factors for Social Isolation/Loneliness

- Having a mental or physical challenge, such as:
 - Chronic disease or condition
 - Psychiatric or depressive condition
 - Long - term disability
- Limited or no access to resources, such as:
 - Living in rural areas
 - Limited transportation
 - Language barriers
- Marginalization or discrimination
- Facing a divorce, unemployment, or loss of a loved one

Circles of Support

- Inner: people you could call at 2am
- Middle: people you regularly interact with
- Outer: acquaintances/community connections

Where do you feel most supported?
Where are you lacking connections?





02

For Your Health

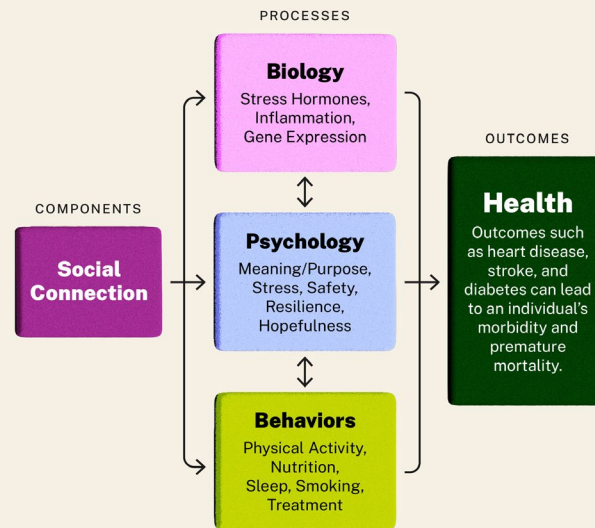
Social Connection and Health



How Social Connection Influences Health

How Does Social Connection Influence Health?

Social connection influences health through **three principal pathways**: biology, psychology, and behavior.



Impact of Social Disconnection



Physical Health

Social isolation and loneliness lead to higher risk of heart disease and diabetes.



Mental Health

Social isolation leads to increased depression and anxiety.



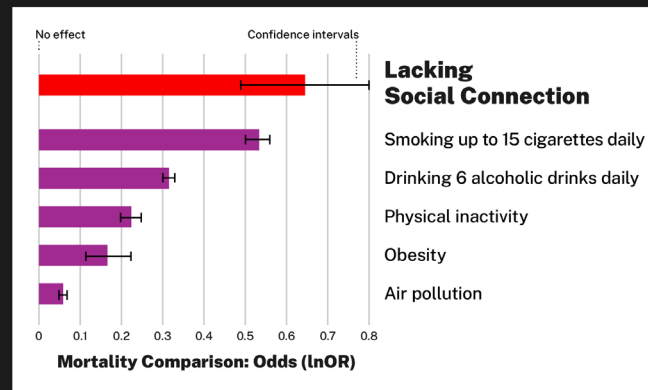
Overall Well -Being

People who are lonely struggle at work, earn less, and face job instability.

Impact of Social Disconnection

- Social isolation in older adults accounts for an estimated \$6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending
- Students who are isolated are more likely to drop out of school

Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.



Comparison groups: Complex measures of social integration: high v. low; not smoking v. smoking < 15 cigarettes daily; alcohol abstinence v. drinking > 6 alcoholic drinks daily; physical activity v. inactivity; low BMI v. high BMI; low air pollution v. high air pollution.

Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States. *American Psychology*. 2017;72(6):517-530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103. This graph is a visual approximation.

Benefits of Social Connection

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Safer communities | Lower risk of early death | Lower dementia risk |
| Better cognitive function | Greater recovery from mental health conditions | Reduced risk of hypertension |
| Better self-care | Better medical adherence | Higher grades in school |
| Lower rates of anxiety | Lower rates of depression | Less risky behaviors in youth |
| Higher self-esteem | Stronger immune system | Faster disease recovery |

Impact of Social Connection on Health

- Better self - rated health in people with diabetes
- Improved disease management and health
- Less chronic work stress and burnout
- Community - based activities and volunteering can equip us with better skills to make us more employable

Impact of Social Connection on Community Health

- Increased social connection leads to lower crime
- Greater sense of trust and belonging
- Connected communities lead to economic prosperity
- More likely to build partnerships to support health
- More likely to participate in health - protective behaviors
- Increased social capital



03



Social Infrastructure

The building blocks of social connection

Where We Build Connections

Third Spaces

Coffee shops,
community markets,
libraries, parks,
gyms, etc.

Neighborhoods

Association
meetings, walking,
apartment
complexes

Volunteering

Regular or one - off
volunteer
opportunities

Community Programming

Events, classes,
shows, festivals

School/ Child Care

During pick-
up/drop-off, school
events

Networking

Professional and
social networking
events

How We Build Connections

Repeated Exposure

Going to the same class, gym time, church service, volunteer shift, grocery store, coffee shop, etc.

Structured Environments

Faith communities, adult sports leagues, book clubs, hobby groups, community classes, etc.

Trying Something New

Hosting a potluck, trying a new gym, going to a new part of town, introducing yourself to your neighbor

Community Building...Big or Small

- The health benefits of social connection can come from one strong relationship
- Just because someone has a lot of friends doesn't mean they don't get lonely
- It's about quality, not quantity

Asset Mapping

- Strengths - based approach to community development
- Identifying people, places, things address needs and foster community
- Building a literal map of how and where people build connections

Asset Mapping – Let's Do It!

Grab sticky notes and start writing

- Locations you feel connected to others
- Where you go to build new connections
- Where you go to strengthen your existing connections
- Activities/events in Muncie



04

Getting Connected

The ties that bind us across Muncie

**Putting yourself
out there**

**Sides-giving 2025
Here!
Sunday, November 16th
5pm-7pm**

**Bring a side to share or just bring
yourself. Everyone is welcome!**

Standing Up For Each Other

Stand Up If You:

Have moved in the past 5 years

Work remotely

Live alone

Are a new parent

Are a college student away from home

Feel like your transportation is a barrier to socializing

Feel like you could use more connections

All of these experiences shape how we interact and socialize

Micro -Actions That Build Community

- Learn people's names
- Make eye contact and say hello
- Be consistent
- Celebrate the little things
- Try something new
- Be curious, not judgmental



How to Improve Your Social Connections

- Invest time in your relationships
- Minimize distractions during conversations
- Seek opportunities to serve and support others
- Be responsive, supportive, and practice gratitude
- Actively engage with people of different backgrounds and experiences
- Participate in social and community groups
- Seek help during times of struggle
- Make time for civic engagement

Community Building

Cardinal
Wellness

Neighborhood
Associations

Farmers
Markets

Funcie Run
Club

Walking Clubs

Community
Events

Pop-Up Events

Neighborhood
Potlucks

Stitch n B....



Cardinal Wellness



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**
Healthy Lifestyle Center



We provide equipment for class participants.
Questions please contact the HLC @ 765-285-1293 or email hlc765@bsu.edu

Resistance Training

@Harvest Christian Church
1010 E. Centennial Ave., Muncie
Two class times to fit your schedule.
Monday & Thursday | 7 p.m.
Wednesday | 11:30 a.m.

Zumba

@Harvest Christian Church
1010 E. Centennial Ave., Muncie
Monday & Thursday | 6 p.m.

Chair Stretching

@Harvest Christian Church
1010 E. Centennial Ave., Muncie
Monday & Thursday | 5:15 p.m.

Free Community Fitness Classes

Line Dancing

@Mad Jax
515 E Main St, Muncie
Tuesday & Thursday | 1:30 p.m.

Yoga

@Health Professions Building
1615 W. Riverside Ave, Muncie, room 204
Free parking in the Clinic Parking Lot
Tuesday & Thursday | 12 p.m.

@Ball State ECAP Downtown
306 South Walnut Street, Muncie
Two class times to fit your schedule.
Monday & Wednesday | 6 p.m.
Tuesday & Thursday | 9 a.m.

@Muncie Senior Center
2517 W 8th St, Muncie
Chair Yoga targeted for ages 55+ open to all
Wednesdays | 3 p.m.



We're part of the
Interprofessional Community Clinic



Find us on
Social Media
@cohicc

D20 Dungeon



Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 7 PM – 10 PM

Community Board Game Night

2501 N Wheeling Ave, Muncie, IN, United States, Indiana 47303



SECRET
DUNGEON

Mon 9 March

A One-Shot
By Dick the Duke

D20 DUNGEON
THE OFFICIAL D&D STORE

Secret Dungeon - One-Shot
D20 Dungeon
March 9, 2026 | 06:00pm Onwards

\$25.00
View Event

BLACKBOX
SUPER PRISON

Mon 23 March

A One-Shot
By Dick the Duke

D20 DUNGEON
THE OFFICIAL D&D STORE

Blackbox Super Prison - One-Shot
D20 Dungeon
March 23, 2026 | 06:00pm Onwards

\$25.00
View Event

Community Events



FIRST THURSDAY MUNCIE COMMUNITY EVENTS

FIRST THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH • 5–8 PM

Join us on the first Thursday of each month from 5–8 pm for a gallery walk around DWNTWN Muncie. Watch and learn from local artists as they perform their craft in various DWNTWN shops. Enjoy their company and purchase their unique creations.

Brink of Summer ArtsWalk + Flower Hour

Thursday, June 4, 2026
5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

A special edition of First Thursday, Brink of Summer ArtsWalk + Flower Hour celebrates the arts culture in Muncie. Watch and learn from local artists as they perform and exhibit their craft, support vendors at YART, explore the DWNTWN community as you collect a unique bouquet of flowers, and experience local and regional printmakers creating larger-than-life prints using a steamroller as a press.

[VIEW EVENT](#)

Muncie Three Trails Music Series: Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper

Saturday, July 11, 2026
7:00 PM – 10:00 PM

BLUEGRASS • CANAN COMMONS


The Muncie Three Trails Music Series is a non-profit partnership between MDDP, MuncieArts, and Rick Zeigler, series founder and organizer. The mission of the series is to bring critically acclaimed, national recording artists to perform free concerts in Muncie, Indiana.

[LEARN MORE](#)



In Closing...

Make a friend, try something new,
and improve your health and the
health of your community!



Thank you!

Do you have any questions?

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