

# E A M E S S E N G E R I P

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## Supporting a Healthy Organization

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### HEALTHY PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Want to live a healthy lifestyle? Eat nutritious foods, exercise regularly, get adequate sleep — and connect with people.

Social connections also affect your intellectual and psychological health. Research shows that the human brain is “hardwired” for personal interaction: Complex neurological impulses underlie human desire to connect with other people. These impulses activate sensations of calmness, acceptance, and emotional resonance (agreement between the emotions that someone else is expressing and your own) — important ingredients in close relationships with significant others, family members or friends.

These findings underscore the value of social interaction to improving your overall wellbeing. Consider the relationships in your life, how they affect you, and what you can do to foster healthy bonds.

#### FAMILY

Relationships with your next of kin greatly impact your life. Your spouse, children, parents, siblings, and extended family share your personal history, traditions, culture and values. Doing family group activities or spending one-on-one time with children creates shared memories, sends strong messages of love, and builds a foundation of people to lean on for support, creating emotional stability.

Quality time emerges from quantity time: The more time spent together, the better chance for sharing quality experiences. If you’re having trouble fitting in downtime, try keeping track of how your family spends time for one week, and find a few timeslots where you could squeeze in a group activity.

**Start small.** Begin with simple activities, like walking to school or work together. Prepare a meal with each other or share a chore. Make a game out of raking the yard or share a pot of tea while folding laundry. Play or spend time with your pet. Doing physical activities together can be a fun way to get everyone moving and enjoy each other’s company.

**Eat together.** Family meals help everyone feel more connected. Talking about events of the



day and sharing stories about what is happening in your lives helps start important conversations and gives everyone a chance to check in with one another. Keep the conversation positive — save negative topics for another time.

**Be playful.** Sharing fun and laughter fosters compassion and trust. Dedicate leisure time for family game night or impromptu celebrations. An hour spent playing scrabble or answering trivia questions brings people closer together, sparks conversations, and keeps relations vibrant. If you feel silly playing games or telling jokes, watch a comedy film together and don’t hold back. There’s nothing like a good laugh to release tension.

**Try something new.** Learn a sport or skill together. Check with local recreation departments for programs like family karate, watercolor painting, or cooking. Go bowling, or visit an art gallery with family members. Work on a creative project together, like making a model airplane or redecorating a room. Ask family members for their ideas for shared activities.

**Do good together.** Volunteering as a family promotes positive values such as caring and sympathy and teaches new skills in the process. Parents get to spend quality time with their children in a positive environment while serving as role models. Families increase their sense of cohesion and connections to the broader community.

#### SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

When was the last time you checked in with your partner — not just about who’s working

late or picking up the groceries, but about your relationship? If you’re like most people, it’s been a while. Even if you’re perfectly happy, day-to-day behaviors can slowly unravel a strong bond. Being mindful of your interactions can protect and improve your relationship.

**Practice gratitude.** True, it’s important to talk through disagreements and problems at home. It’s just as important, though, to focus on the positives.

Praising something a loved one did well, giving a compliment, or saying “thank you” immediately strengthens your relationship. In a recent study, spouses who felt that their efforts to do nice acts were appreciated reported being happier with, and more committed to, their marriages. Practicing gratitude also has a protective effect when couples fight. Thank you’s don’t have to be spoken: Spontaneous texts and handwritten notes taped to the bathroom mirror send positive vibes and kindle feelings of love and connection.

**Create a parenting plan.** Partners who evenly share child-rearing duties have higher relationship satisfaction and fewer arguments than those in households where one parent handles the majority of childcare. Research shows that seeing yourselves as equal providers takes stress off of each parent and helps you appreciate each other more. A 50-50 division of tasks may not be feasible for everyone, and that’s okay. It’s more important to have clear expectations as to who is going to do what and be flexible with those expectations. Determine what works best for your family: If your partner handles most of the parenting on weeknights, for example, try to be more involved in the mornings and weekends. And if you feel overwhelmed by the responsibility, use “we” (rather than “I”) language to bring it up. For example, saying “Can we talk about how we can work together to make things run more smoothly at home?” invites your partner to be collaborative rather than defensive.

**Let go of grudges.** If you seethe with anger and give the cold shoulder after an argument, you may not notice your partner trying to patch things up. This leaves both sides feeling hurt and resentful. Find a way to articulate exactly

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what you need so you can move forward. It may be a hug and an apology, or reassurance that things will change in the future. It's okay to walk away from a fight and gather your thoughts alone, but be careful that this moment doesn't turn into days of silence. Talk through the problem, admit your faults and pardon your loved one's. Working through rough periods helps relationships become more solid.

**Avoid digital distractions.** Don't let a smart phone ruin date night. When a partner 'phone snubs' — constantly checking emails or looking at Facebook — it sends a signal that their phone is more important than the company or conversation. You don't need to be fully present every second you're with your partner, but eliminating distractions is crucial when you're devoting one-on-one time together. Establish ground rules for device use. Decide when and where they should be off limits, like at the dinner table or while watching your favorite shows.

## FRIENDS

You may have hundreds of Facebook friends, but what about a true friend? Do you have a pal who shares your history, someone you can call to celebrate achievements or lift you up when you're troubled? Somebody who knows your story, your faults, your embarrassing moments, and still loves you? If so, then consider yourself fortunate, and do all you can to tend that relationship.

**Keep contact.** Good friends don't let too much time slip by without connecting. A friend wants to know about your life and share it with you. Fill gaps between longer conversations with quick texts, email check-ins, and drive-by hellos.

**Don't keep score.** Friends don't worry about who made the last phone call or invitation. There are periods when one friend has more time, energy, or money. Over the long run everything balances out.

**Remember occasions.** Good friends acknowledge birthdays and important events in each other's lives. Regular, small gestures of friendship, such as sending cards or stopping by with flowers, are thoughtful ways to say, "You're special." If you haven't seen an old friend for a

long time, make the effort to reconnect and rejuvenate your longtime friendship.

**Keep your old friends, and make new ones.** Networking with people who share your interests, issues or situation gives you a sense of belonging and relieves stress. Having more people who call you a friend reinforces the idea that you're a good person to be around.

Making new connections can be challenging — you might feel nervous when meeting someone for the first time. It only takes a few minutes for someone to form an impression of you, so grab the opportunity to win them over right away and get your relationship off to a strong start.

## NEIGHBORS

Winter weather may keep you from chatting over the fence, but forming neighborhood friendships benefits your health. Data extrapolated from 148 research studies show that people who experienced frequent social interaction with neighbors had a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those who stayed isolated. Get friendly with your neighbors, to ensure your and their good health.

**Lend a hand.** Offer to collect a traveling neighbor's newspaper or water their houseplants. Look after each other's children. Help shovel a walkway, let them borrow your snow blower, or bring them food.

**Celebrate the seasons.** Consider a festive or relaxed gathering at your place, and invite your neighbors to share in the planning, whether for a wintry chili party, or a springtime brunch.

**Move together.** Invite neighbors to walk with you on weekend mornings or bundle up for a moonlight stroll. Help the kids next door construct a snow fort. Organize a cross-country ski adventure for local families on nearby trails.

**Watch out for each other.** After a snowstorm or power outage, make sure people who live nearby are okay. Check on local residents going through tough times or illness. A study of older Americans found that higher levels of neighborhood cohesion protect against stroke.

## WORK AT IT

Good friends, a spouse, close neighbor or

loyal partner can make life feel complete, but interacting isn't always easy. The strongest friendships, marriages, and partnerships involve ongoing effort and compromise by both parties. In healthy relationships, each person knows they can count on the other. If you make promises, keep them. If you have responsibilities, complete them. Communicate openly, taking time to explain what you're thinking and how you feel, and really listen to what the other person says. Anticipate that people change over time and your relationship will evolve. Welcome change as an opportunity to reconnect and strengthen your bond.

Conflicts are inevitable, but working through them helps relationships evolve and solidify. Work through problems with dispute resolution tactics.

**Let them tell their side.** When people are upset, they need to tell their version of the story. Give the benefit of the doubt. Listen to what is said and the emotions behind it, and tune in to information that might allow a solution to emerge naturally.

**Clarify your understanding.** Restate the issues and identify topics of concern. Use language such as, "I hear you saying that..." or "I think you're telling me..." Ask questions to uncover what has not been said and suggest solutions.

### Generate options for mutual gain.

Brainstorm together, looking for a result in which both sides benefit. Make a proposal where you can both say "yes." When you generate solutions together, you'll build trust and promote collaboration.

**Confess and forgive.** Pardon your friend or family member's errors and admit when you're wrong. Talk through issues and try to reach a mutual agreement on how to handle the situation in the future.

Along with good nutrition, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep, a comprehensive wellness plan includes cultivating broad and deep social connections. Maintaining healthy relationships mitigates health risks and helps you stay physically and mentally fit.

## RESOURCES

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Doing Good Together, a national nonprofit organization that promotes family volunteer service ideas. [www.doinggoodtogether.org/](http://www.doinggoodtogether.org/)  
Mental Health America, tips for Connecting with Others: [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/connect-others](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/connect-others)  
"The Neurobiology of Human Relationships," an online video in which psychologist Dr. Ruth Buczynski interviews Dr. Louis Cozolino, professor of psychology at Pepperdine University, about the Neurobiology of Human Relationships. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gprqHsvj-U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gprqHsvj-U)



• Eating meals with your family, playing games, and having fun together strengthens emotional bonds and creates emotional stability.

• Relationships are stronger when partners practice gratitude, make new memories together, and put an effort into focusing on each other.

• Friends provide a sense of belonging and source of support.

• Good neighbors provide practical and emotional aid.

• Strong bonds involve ongoing effort and compromise. Communicate openly, work through conflicts, and welcome opportunities to reconnect.

## EAP SERVICES



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