

“SOCIAL CURE”: 5 STEPS TO CONNECT WITH GROUPS TO BOOST WELL-BEING



GROUPS ARE GOOD FOR YOU

“Social Cure” research has found that *groups are good for us*.

People with many high-quality group memberships have higher well-being than those with few—above and beyond the number of interpersonal relationships they have. In other words, the [Social Cure effect](#) of group membership is distinct from the benefits that interpersonal relationships offer. Both are very important to well-being.

QUICKSTART GUIDE TO BECOMING A JOINER

This activity is designed to help you set goals and make a plan for building more high-quality social group connections.

Quick Start Guide: How to Find & Join a Group

1. **Know Yourself** – What do you enjoy? What matters to you? Sketch a “Me Pie” with your interests and values.
2. **Map Your World** – Identify important people, places, and activities in your life. Do your group memberships reflect these priorities?
3. **Find a Group** – Explore community centers, online platforms, volunteer orgs, and hobby clubs.
4. **Make a Plan** – Choose a group to try, set a goal, and schedule your first step.
5. **Engage & Contribute** – Join in, participate, and give back to make it meaningful!

Now, dive in and find your people!

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”

- Brene Brown

5 STEPS TO BUILD MORE HIGH-QUALITY GROUP CONNECTIONS



STEP 1: Know Yourself

You'll start by thinking deeply about what's important to you and how you can better structure your group memberships and contributions to reflect that.

In an ideal world, we benefit most from a good fit between our sense of self and our social world. We want our groups to reflect who we are and what's important to us.

So, an essential first step to deciding in which group memberships to invest and how to do so is to reflect on who you are and what's important to you right now.

First, think about all the different aspects that make up how you see yourself as a person.

This can be in terms of your:

- Interests
- Values
- Personality
- Relationships
- Groups
- Activities
- Beliefs
- Aspirations
- Social Category Identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, cultural heritage, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, profession, university member)

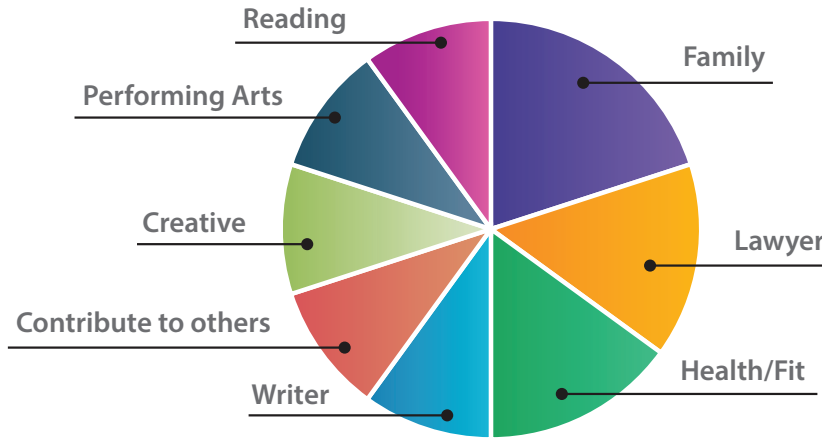
For example, you may have as part of your self-concept: family member (e.g., spouse, parent, sibling), legal professional, good writer, being in nature, experiencing music, hiking, love reading, kindness, stewardship, soccer player, runner, vegetarian, painter, spiritual. The possibilities are nearly endless. Focus on those that are most descriptive of who you are or want to be.

Then, for each part of your self-concept that you identify, think about how crucial it is to how you see yourself.

Next, you'll design your own "Me Pie" to reflect your priorities. Very important parts of you should be bigger in your "Me Pie," and less important parts should be smaller.

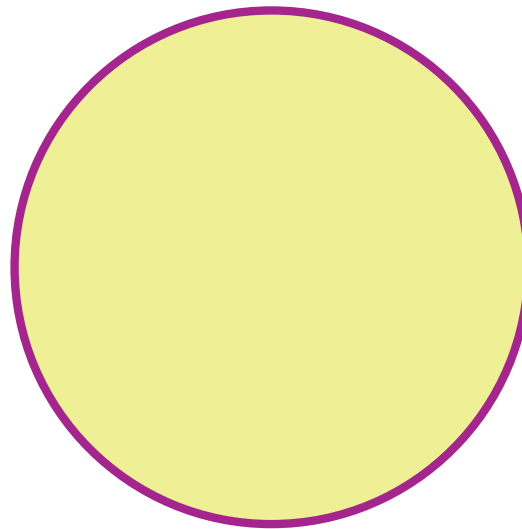
To help you work on this, an example is provided here.

The "Me Pie" (Example)



After reflecting on your own self-concept, design your own "Me Pie."

Design Your Own "Me Pie"



Review your Me Pie and consider whether any of your self-aspects are not well-represented by your current social groups and activities. For example, if family is an important part of your self-aspect, are you involved as much as you'd like to be in family activities? If spirituality is an important part of who you are, are you connected to social groups that connect to that aspect of your identity?

Write down any gaps between your important self-aspects and your social groups and activities:



STEP 2: *Map Your World: Important People, Places, & Activities*

- Next, you'll turn your attention to the people, places, and activities that are important to you as a step toward deciding how to invest in new or existing group memberships.
- The questions below can help guide your thinking about the people, places, and activities that are important to you.
- After reflecting on these questions, go to the Map provided at the end of this Guide. Plot the people, places, and things that you've identified. Place the most important items closer to the center of the Map and the less important items on the outer rings.
- The people, places, and activities that you map may relate to your current life, things in the past that remain important, or future possibilities.
- Your Map doesn't need to be comprehensive. It should just provide a broad picture of your connections that are significant to you.



PEOPLE

- Who are the people that are important to you—e.g., family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances? You can name important individuals (e.g., spouse) or whole groups of people (e.g., college roommates, family, religious community). Place these people on the Map in terms of importance.
- Are there important people with whom you're currently in contact?
- Are there other people with whom you have little contact right now but who are still important to you?
- Are there any other types of people you might want to get to know in the future—group memberships or relationships that you would like to develop or change?



PLACES

- What are the places that you currently go that are important to you? Place them on the Map.
- Are there important places that you used to go but that you haven't visited for a while? You might consider, for example, parks, recreation facilities, libraries, health centers, shops, community centers, or faith community centers. (Try to name places specifically (e.g. Corner Bookstore & Cafe) rather than simply saying "book shop.")
- How much time do you spend at each place?
- Why do you like it there? Do these qualities give you ideas about the kinds of places you most enjoy and where you might like to spend more time?



ACTIVITIES

- What activities do you currently do that are important to you? Do you have any hobbies or interests? Are there any groups or societies that organize activities in which you engage? Place them on the Map.
- Are there any important activities that you used to do, or interests that you used to have, but that you are no longer engaged in?
- Are there activities you would like to spend more time doing?
- Are there activities that you feel obligated to do but would rather not do them?
- Do you have any interests that you haven't yet pursued?

STEP 3: Find a Group that Reflects Who You Are

You'll benefit most from groups that you don't perceive as an "optional extra" but as an important part of who you are. Below are four group features to look for and cultivate because they aid the development of meaningful group connections:

1. POSITIVE:

We have positive feelings about our groups and find them meaningful (Bentley et al., 2020). For example, they may:

- Boost our self-esteem because we're proud to be members.
- Contribute to a sense of meaningfulness based on the group's activities, mission, or contribution to a sense of being valued and mattering.
- Foster a sense of belonging while also enabling individual authenticity.
- Bolster our self-efficacy or confidence to take on challenges or overcome setbacks.

2. SUPPORTIVE:

Our groups support us in ways important to us—such as:

- Emotional support (e.g., caring, empathy, love, trust).
- Instrumental support (e.g., things, services, aid).
- Informational support (problem-solving, appraisal, support for self-evaluation).

3. REPRESENTATIVE:

We feel like a prototypical member of the group—i.e., that we're similar to other group members in ways that are important to who we are.

4. COMPATIBLE:

- Our multiple groups are compatible when we're able to harmonize them. They're incompatible when they have contradictory expectations regarding norms, attitudes, values, and behavior (Bentley et al., 2020).

Social Group Examples

- Affinity group
- Alumni club
- Bar association
- Board member for a company
- Class at a university
- Work colleagues
- Association of businesspeople
- Family
- Firm committee
- Friend group
- Animal rights organization
- Anime club
- Artist cooperative
- Book club
- Bridge club
- Chess club
- Community organization
- Community theater
- Cooking club
- Dance club
- Gaming club
- Genealogy & family history group
- Health & wellness group
- Language learning meetup
- Legal Aid community
- LGBTQ+ support organization
- Men's shed
- Military unit
- Music band
- Nation
- Online hobby forum
- Outdoor adventure group
- Parenting group
- Parent-teacher association
- Patron circle at a museum
- Philanthropic organization
- Philosophy discussion forum
- Poker club
- Political party
- Professional association
- Public interest organization
- Racial or ethnic community
- Recreational sport/ intramural team
- Religious congregation
- Role-playing and cosplay group
- Seniors group
- Social club
- Sports team
- Support group
- Travel club
- Urban gardening establishment
- Veteran organization
- Volunteer and community support network
- Walking/hiking club
- Women's group
- Work group
- Writers' co-op
- Yoga club



STEP 4: Make a Plan

Now you're ready to begin setting goals and planning what steps you can take to achieve them.

Here are some areas to focus on:

- With which groups or individuals would you like to strengthen existing connections?
- In what new group or activity would you like to become involved that will give you opportunities to connect with others, make friends, and/or engage in something important to you?
- In what ways would you like to explore new social activities and group identities? What can you contribute to these groups? How do you hope that these groups can benefit you?



STATE YOUR GOAL(S):

What goal(s) would you like to set for building your social connections to a group? You may want to refer to your Map for ideas about where to start.

- What social goals are currently a priority or feel most important to you?
- How can you break down your goals into manageable chunks?



DESCRIBE NEXT STEPS:

- What are a few next steps that you can take to move you closer to achieving each goal?



SET YOUR TIME FRAME:

- What is the time frame for each of your next steps—e.g., “within two weeks,” “by the end of May”?
- Pick a timeframe for each step that feels achievable.



COLLECT HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- What resources can you draw on to help you achieve your goal?
- Are there coping strategies you've learned that are helpful when facing new challenges?
- Are there people you can recruit to support your goals? Would telling someone your goals help hold you accountable?
- Would it be helpful to invite someone to attend activities with you?
- Are there people who can introduce you to a group in which you're interested?
- Are there any materials or equipment that you need to acquire before getting started?





STEP 5: ENGAGE AND CONTRIBUTE

A BALANCE OF BOTH GIVING & RECEIVING

Groups are a collaborative exercise which work best when everyone plays a part—both giving and receiving as they need.

Like a healthy plant, groups need nurturing to be beneficial. Nurturing is a two-way street. Not only should the group nurture us, but we should also nurture the group.

So, when planning how you want to invest in group memberships, think about what you do (or could do) to support your groups. What help, benefits, support, and/or advice can you give? In turn, what would you like to receive from your groups?

SHARE THE LOAD ACROSS GROUPS

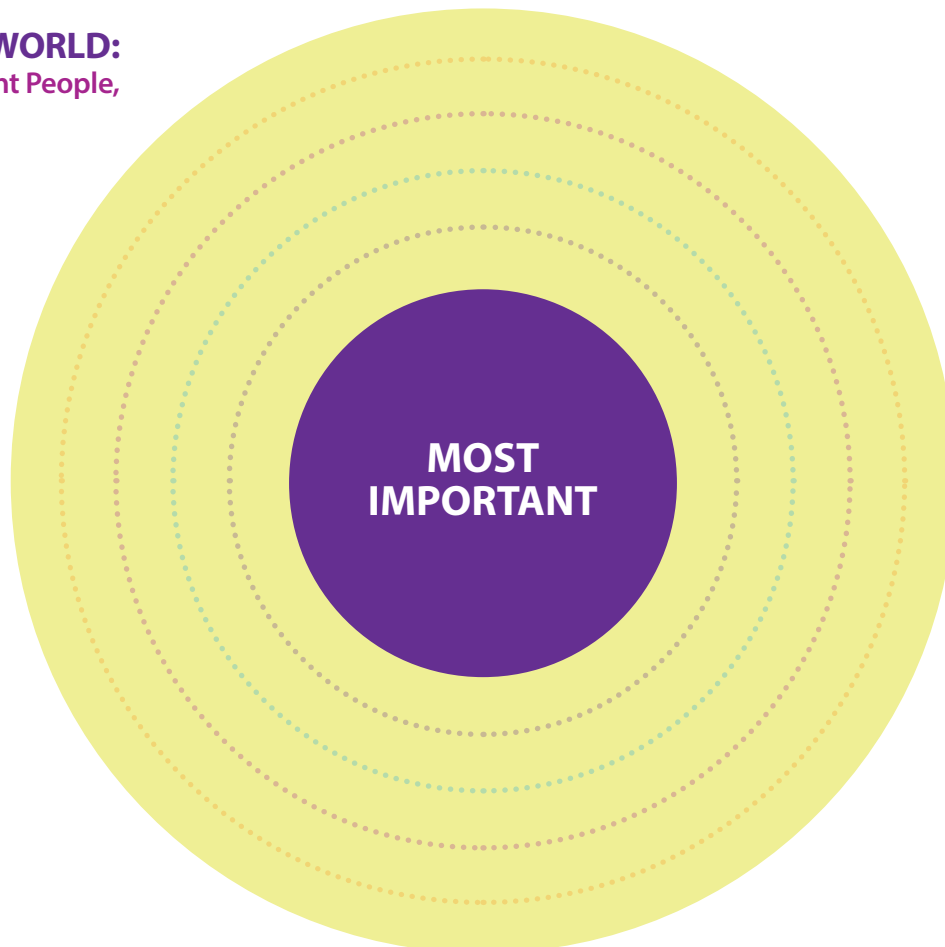
We sometimes find ourselves relying on some groups more than others or relying on one group all the time. This can lead to disappointment if we don't get the support we want from them.

Or we sometimes find that we're giving just to one group all the time and our other groups are losing out.

Coming back to our plant idea, these situations are like over-watering or under-watering. To make the most of giving and receiving, we will want to try to "share the load" across our important groups.

MAPPING MY WORLD:

Map Your Important People, Places, & Activities



Sources:

This worksheet was adapted from: National Institute for Health Research (NIHR, July 2022), *Community navigator manual*, Vol 2. Available at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/priment/sites/priment/files/community_navigator_programme_manual_v2_july_2022.pdf.

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Dr. Anne M. Brafford, JD, MAPP, PhD, is the owner of Aspire, an education and consulting firm for the legal profession (www.aspire.legal). She is a co-founder of the Institute for Well-Being in Law, the creator of the annual Well-Being Week in Law (WWIL), and co-chair of WWIL 2025. Previously an equity partner at one of the nation's largest law firms, Anne now focuses on individual and workplace thriving, especially the intersection of inclusion, engagement, and well-being. Her book, *Positive Professionals*, provides science-based guidance for increasing engagement in law firms. Anne has earned a PhD in positive organizational psychology from Claremont Graduate University and a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) from University of Pennsylvania. Anne can be reached at abrafford@aspire.legal.