

# Faith Communities Support Social Relationships

Recent science affirms that having positive social connections is critically important for people's health--on par with eating well and being physically active. Building community and teaching about positive ways for us to relate to each other is the natural work of faith communities of all religious traditions. In a study conducted by Advocate's Congregational Health Partnerships program, congregations demonstrated 11 ways that they nurture social connection among their members and in their communities.

1. **Noticing and Inviting**—Members notice people who are new, hurting or alone and connect them with others and with opportunities to lead and participate;
2. **Practical Support**—Systems exist to offer food, transportation, child care, etc. in times of crisis or on-going need;
3. **Intergenerational Relationships**—Adults know children and children feel known and appreciated. Children have leadership roles;
4. **Faith leader-led Community-Building**—The faith leader models, educates and coaches ways to build relationships among members;
5. **Informal Socializing**—There are opportunities for people to be together informally and for people to gather outside of their usual group;
6. **Learning Together**—Regular times for learning, both spiritually and about issues of concern, and for teaching each other;
7. **Sacred Intimacy and Belongingness**—Spaces exist for people to share deeply with each other about their lives, struggles and hopes;
8. **Worship Life**—There are religious practices that help us connect with each other and that actively use music and the arts;
9. **Community Outreach**—Members have relationships with people living in the community. The congregation participates with initiatives that are priorities for the community;
10. **Mission and Social Justice**—The congregation uses its influence to improve conditions for people in their community or around the world;
11. **Small groups**—Members gather in formal and informal small groups and intentional gatherings around common concerns or experiences.

What are the ways that your faith community supports social connections? What more can you do? What do you do that is not on this list?

Wishing you joy and good health,  
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