

## WEEK 2: POSITIVE CONNECTION

Nurturing meaningful connections offers a range of advantages, such as an improved sense of belonging, well-being, and longevity. Prioritizing positive relationships, marked by trust and effective communication, fosters emotional support, happiness, stress reduction, and overall improved mental health.

**IMPORTANT:** Please know that healthy connection alone is not going to resolve mental health problems like anxiety, depression, disordered eating, or decrease the impact of external factors such as trauma or systemic oppression. If you are struggling with these challenges the University of Iowa has professional resources to support you. Start here to find resources: <https://mentalhealth.uiowa.edu/>

### 1. Talk to or spend time with someone you care about.

Engaging in social interactions with those we care about offers numerous health benefits, such as stress reduction, improved mood, positive health behaviors, better cardiovascular health, extended lifespan, and overall well-being. Additionally, studies have shown, maintaining healthy friendships contributes to the development of a reliable support system which can result in reduced anxiety, increased brain power, lower loneliness, improved fitness, higher life satisfaction, enhanced health, and decreased pain levels.

Tips for maximizing opportunities and time spent with others	
<b>Schedule a time</b>	Allocate dedicated time for meaningful conversations or activities to strengthen your bond.
<b>Check-in regularly</b>	Establish a habit of checking in regularly to maintain an ongoing connection and demonstrate your care and interest.
<b>Multi-task</b>	Ask a friend to join a workout class, chat with a friend over a walk, etc.
<b>Share activities</b>	Engage in activities you both enjoy to build shared experiences and memories.
<b>Be present</b>	Minimize distractions and be fully present in the moment when spending time together.
<b>Respect boundaries</b>	Be attentive to the boundaries and comfort levels of both you and your loved one in your interactions.

Keep in mind, there's no expiration date for cultivating new friendships or reestablishing connections with old friends. Investing time in fostering these relationships can yield better health and a more optimistic perspective in the years ahead.

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### 2. List your personal boundaries in friendships and relationships.

Your boundaries serve as guidelines for how others understand how to interact with you, how you prefer to be treated, and what actions you are willing to accept or reject—shaped by your own needs and desires. Establishing personal boundaries is essential in various facets of life, encompassing work, home, family, and social interactions. These boundaries play a pivotal role in nurturing emotional and physical well-being. They not only contribute to fostering positive relationships and shaping a healthy self-concept but also create trust and define expectations for behavior. Healthy boundaries serve as filters for negativity, builders of confidence, and preventers of conflicts. Improving boundary development involves valuing emotions, practicing assertiveness, setting clear limits, enhancing self-awareness, and learning to say no. Identifying what is appropriate in various contexts and fostering open communication are essential elements in creating and maintaining healthy boundaries.

Types of Boundaries to consider:	Tips for developing healthy boundaries:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><u>Emotional:</u></b> How to best protect your own emotional well-being.</li> <li>2. <b><u>Physical:</u></b> How to best protect your physical space.</li> <li>3. <b><u>Sexual:</u></b> How to best protect your needs and safety, sexually.</li> <li>4. <b><u>School/Workplace:</u></b> How to best protect your ability to do your work without interference or drama.</li> <li>5. <b><u>Material:</u></b> How to best protect your personal belongings.</li> <li>6. <b><u>Time:</u></b> How to best protect the use, and misuse of your time.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess your needs and beliefs. (consider looking at Maslows hierarchy of needs to make an inventory of your needs and beliefs)</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>The diagram is a pyramid with five horizontal layers, each with a different color and icon. From top to bottom: 1. Orange layer with an eye icon, labeled 'SELF-ACTUALISATION' with the subtext 'Desire to become the most that one can be'. 2. Yellow layer with a crown icon, labeled 'ESTEEM' with the subtext 'Respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom'. 3. Green layer with a heart icon, labeled 'LOVE &amp; BELONGING' with the subtext 'Friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection'. 4. Blue layer with a shield icon, labeled 'SAFETY NEEDS' with the subtext 'Personal security, employment, resources, health, property'. 5. Pink layer with a person icon, labeled 'PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS' with the subtext 'Air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction'.</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know what you want in a relationship.</li> <li>• Don't compromise your values for others.</li> <li>• Communicate clearly.</li> <li>• Restate your needs if a boundary is crossed.</li> <li>• Have clear and reasonable consequences for crossing a boundary. *Only state consequences that you are willing to enforce.</li> <li>• Understand your hard (non-negotiable) and soft (flexible) boundaries.</li> <li>• Learn to say no.</li> </ul>

**Read more here:**

- [Personal Boundaries: Types and How to Set Them | Psych Central](#)

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### 3. Engage in at least 5 acts of kindness.

Look for opportunities to be kind in your day-to-day life. Practicing kindness has profound effects on both psychological and physical well-being. Simple acts, such as letting someone cut in front of you in traffic, lending a helping hand, or holding a door open can significantly impact happiness and contentment. Kindness is linked to increased happiness and gratitude, promoting empathy and compassion, and reducing stress. Engaging in acts of kindness releases neurochemicals, fostering a "helper's high" and even reducing pain. Notably, kindness enhances emotional and physical health, promotes self-esteem, strengthens bonds between individuals, and contributes to a sense of community and belonging. It is a universal language that transcends barriers and has a positive ripple effect. Incorporating kindness into daily life, both towards others and oneself, is a simple yet powerful way to improve overall mental and emotional health.

**REMINDER:** Practicing kindness can start with being kind to yourself. Reflect on how your interactions with others improve when you've taken care of yourself. Hence, remember to extend kindness to yourself.

Acts of kindness don't necessarily require a significant amount of time or financial investment. Explore the following examples for inspiration.

At home/ In your community	At school/ A public place	On social media	To yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check on someone who you know is going through a tough time.</li><li>• Send someone a handwritten thank you note.</li><li>• Tell someone how much you love and appreciate them.</li><li>• Help with household chores.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Say hello or provide a kind smile to a passer-by.</li><li>• Be a considerate walker/cyclist /driver.</li><li>• Pick up trash when you see it.</li><li>• Get to know a new classmate or a campus acquaintance.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write something nice or encouraging on a post you appreciate.</li><li>• Acknowledge and validate someone's story.</li><li>• Think twice about the kindness of the posts and sources you share online.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize some 'me' time.</li><li>• Treat yourself to something you have been wanting.</li><li>• Do an activity you enjoy.</li><li>• Spend time in nature or your favorite setting.</li></ul>

**Explore a more about the benefits and options for practicing kindness:**

- [Kindness matters guide | Mental Health Foundation](#)

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### 4. Browse campus resources that might be helpful for you.

Browsing campus resources is benefits as it allows you to access valuable support systems, information, and services tailored to your needs. These resources can enhance your academic success, provide essential assistance, support your well-being, and contribute to an overall positive and enriching campus experience.

**If you are not sure where to start, consider these questions:  
(click to browse the related resources)**

- [Unsure about your major and want to explore potential careers?](#)
- [Want tips for becoming a more successful student?](#)
- [Looking for Academic support?](#)
- [Interested in Supplemental Instruction?](#)
- [Experiencing a crisis or emergency situation and need support to navigate it?](#)
- [Need support fulfilling your basic needs \(food insecurity, childcare, healthcare, legal support, housing, clothing, and more\)?](#)
- Sexual Health support?
  - [Free supplies](#)
  - STI Testing: [Gynecology](#) & [Men's Health](#)
- [Are you a 1<sup>st</sup> Generation student?](#)
- Want support for your mental well-being?
  - [University Counseling Services](#)
  - [University Counseling Services Support Groups](#)
  - [Let's talk, Hawks!](#)
  - [Student Health Psychiatry & Mental Health Services](#)
- Wanting to make a change in your physical well-being?
  - [Sleep Support](#)
  - [Tobacco & e-cigarette support](#)
  - [Nutrition Support](#)
  - [Fitness Support](#)
  - [Light Therapy to support Seasonal Affective Disorder](#)
  - [Alcohol & Drug Support](#)
- [Considering recovery, in recovery, or wanting to support those in any stage of recovery from addiction?](#)
- Looking for more campus involvement?
  - [Campus Wellness Leaders](#)
  - [Search Student Organizations](#)

### 5. Establish a tradition that fosters meaningful interactions with others.

**IOWA**

Student Wellness

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Establishing traditions cultivates meaningful connections, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences. Whether rooted in personal or community practices, these traditions enhance communication, understanding, and collaboration, thereby enhancing the richness of social dynamics. Traditions play a crucial role in preserving values, promoting unity, and transmitting cultural identity. They bring individuals together, instill a sense of belonging, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. The shared experiences, values, and knowledge derived from traditions contribute to a person's understanding of their identity and place within a community. Feeling accepted and included through traditions positively impacts well-being and builds a more robust support system. Traditions preserve practices that enrich our lives and celebrate our shared humanity. The repetition of traditions provides comfort and excitement, providing a collective sense of calm. Thoughtfully planned social interactions create a sense of interdependence and contribute to overall well-being.

<b>Tips for creating traditions:</b>	<b>Traditions could include, but are not limited to:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expand on the things you already do</li><li>• Consider joining or attending a class regularly</li><li>• Create a repeat notification in your calendar for your traditions</li><li>• Reflect on your values</li><li>• Set the intentions for your tradition (e.g., to celebrate, to find your calm, to reunite, etc.)</li><li>• Allow room for trial and error as you decide what is fun and meaningful for you</li><li>• Don't be afraid to let go of old traditions that no longer serve you and your loved ones</li><li>• Explore and welcome the cultural traditions and holidays that are meaningful to your friends</li><li>• Make sure your traditions are rooted in respect and unity</li><li>• Divide and conquer the planning</li><li>• Keep an open mind for both digital and in-person opportunities for connection</li><li>• Keep it simple</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making homemade gifts for birthdays or holidays</li><li>• Going hiking in the same place or at the same time</li><li>• Seasonal customs</li><li>• Movie nights</li><li>• Visiting the same restaurants</li><li>• Doing a digital detox</li><li>• Learning or doing a new activity together</li><li>• Starting a gratitude jar</li><li>• Cooking certain recipes</li><li>• Initiating potluck gatherings</li><li>• Starting a game night</li><li>• Focusing on Self-care</li></ul>

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### ***End of Week Reflection:***

Don't forget to submit a reflection at the end of the week on the **Week 2 Reflection Discussion Post** on ICON!

Reflecting helps us develop our skills and review their effectiveness, rather than just carry-on doing things as we have always done them. It is about questioning, in a positive way, what we do and why we do it and then deciding whether there is a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.