FEELING CONNECTED

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: 5 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Humans have a strong drive to be kind, but that drive is usually stronger when they feel connected to other people. To help foster that feeling of closeness, this exercise asks you to think about a time when you felt a strong connection to another person and to describe the experience in writing. Research suggests that reflecting on feelings of connection can increase people’s motivation to help others, whether by helping a friend or stranger in need, volunteering, or donating money. Helping others can, in turn, increase happiness and improve relationships.

TIME REQUIRED

10 minutes. Try to do this practice at least once per week, selecting a different example each time

HOW TO DO IT

1. This exercise draws on a guided meditation created by researcher Helen Weng and her colleagues at the Center for Healthy Minds (CHM) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Dr. Weng called this meditation a “compassion meditation,” though a similar kind of meditation is also referred to as a “loving-kindness meditation.”
2. We recommend listening to the audio of this guided meditation in the player below; you can also download it from the CHM’s website. We have included a script of this meditation to help you follow it yourself or teach it to others. In brackets are the lengths of the pauses in the original guided meditation, to give you a sense of how much time to take for each step.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS


Some study participants reflected on a time when they felt a strong bond with someone else; other participants wrote about a time when they felt especially competent or autonomous. Compared with those in the other groups, the participants who reflected on their experience of closeness reported greater feelings of connectedness and concern for others. What’s more, they also reported a stronger intention to carry out a variety of altruistic behaviors over the next six weeks, including giving money to charity and going out of their way to help a stranger in need.

When they analyzed the data more closely, the researchers found that a greater desire to be kind depended on whether participants experienced greater feelings of connectedness to others after doing the writing exercise.

WHY TO TRY IT

Feeling connected to others is considered to be a fundamental psychological need. When people feel rejected or alone, they may be more likely to focus on themselves and on striving to meet their own unmet needs, rather than attending to the needs of others. When people feel connected and cared about, by contrast, they are better able to expend energy on helping and caring for others.

By reflecting on times when you’ve felt a strong connection with others, and by striving to cultivate more of these experiences, you are
fueling your drive to practice kindness and compassion.

This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.