

FEELING SUPPORTED

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **1X/MONTH** | Duration: **15 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Most of us want to be kind and caring, but that can be easier said than done, especially when we feel stressed, threatened, or insecure. Often in those moments, our natural reaction is to focus on ourselves and make sure that we're safe instead of paying attention to other people's needs and supporting them. But disconnecting from others can actually exacerbate our stress.

This exercise helps free you from that downward spiral. It asks you to think about the people you turn to when you're distressed and recall times when you've felt comforted by them. Research suggests that increasing momentary feelings of comfort by thinking about supportive relationships can make us more trusting, compassionate, and helpful toward others in general.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes. Try to do this practice once a month to sustain your feelings of trust and connection.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Make a list of the people who offer you comfort or security. If it's helpful, consider:

- Who is the person you most like to spend time with?
- Who is the person it is hardest to be away from?
- Who is the person you want to talk to when you are worried about something?
- Who is the person you turn to when you are feeling down?
- Who is the person you know will always be there for you?
- Who is the person you want to share your successes with?

(Some of these might be the same person, of course.)

2. Write down six positive qualities that are common to some or all of these people—qualities that they strongly embody.

3. Next, recall and visualize a specific situation when you were feeling distressed or worried, and one of these people comforted and helped you.

4. Write a brief description of that situation and the way you felt during it.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., Gillath, O., & Nitzberg, R. A. (2005). [Attachment, caregiving, and altruism: Boosting attachment security increases compassion and helping](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(2), 377-389.

Some study participants reflected on a supportive relationship by engaging in this writing exercise; other participants thought about an

acquaintance or a professional relationship. Immediately afterwards, the people who reflected on the supportive relationship reported greater compassion for—and willingness to help—a person in distress.

WHY IT WORKS

A great deal of research points to the importance of “attachment security,” a state that involves feelings of trust and comfort. When we feel safe and secure, our energy can be more easily directed toward caring for others. Reflecting on the people in our life who love and support us can increase our feelings of security and also remind us of the kinds of qualities we want to embody when supporting others—thereby making us more likely to respond compassionately when we encounter someone in need.

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](#).

