



Social Factors: Social Support

Social support refers to the resources provided by other people in times of need. Those who lack social support are more vulnerable to illness when stressful events occur.

What do psychologists know about the relation between health and social support?

- Patients with advanced breast cancer who attend weekly support group sessions survived twice as long as a matched group of patients who did not. There was a comparable level of medical treatment in both groups
- After monitoring the health of 2,800 people, those who had no one to talk to, were three times as likely to die after being hospitalized for a heart attack than those who had at least one person to provide such support.
- Of the nearly 7,000 adults whose health was tracked, those who few social connections were twice as likely to die from all causes than those who had numerous social contacts, even with risk factors such as cigarette smoking, obesity and elevated levels of cholesterol were taken into account.

Social Support

Social support seems to enhance the functioning of our immune system. People who feel that they are a part of a social system experience a greater sense of *identity* and meaning in their lives, which in turn results in greater well-being.

- Friends and relatives can modify our appraisal of the threat of the stressor. Since we are in the situation, we have a difficult time being objective about the situation. The support of others can increase one's sense of control over stressors.
- The presence of supportive others has a calming effect. It seems to decrease the intensity of the physiological stress reaction.
- Social support makes it less likely we will experience negative emotions and reduce risk factors such as loneliness.
- True friends can apply social pressure to prevent people from coping with stressors in maladaptive ways such as alcohol and/or drug use, excessive spending, questionable therapies.
 - This means your friends are willing to tell you what you don't want to hear.
 - This means you are willing to hear what you don't want to hear.

[true words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not true]

Social Support

Is social support a panacea? It depends on how social support is employed.

Negative relations can be a source of stress. The development of good interpersonal relationships is important for making social support effective. The quality of the interpersonal relationships is an important determinant of whether those relationships help or hinder our ability to cope.

- How do you provide effective social support?
- What psychological factors can decrease social support?

Describe behaviors (or thinking patterns) that would generally be perceived as NOT being helpful for providing social support

Describe behaviors (or thinking patterns) that would generally be perceived as being helpful for providing social support

- Talk about yourself and your own problems.
- Give advice that person under stress has not requested.
- Offer your philosophic or religious interpretation of the stressful event by saying things like, "It's just fate", "It's just God's will," or "It's your karma."
- Pretend to be cheerful.
- Tell the person, "I know exactly how you feel".
- Minimize the important of the person's problem by saying things like, "Hey, don't make such a big deal out of it; it could be a lot worse" or "Don't worry, everything will work out."

- Ask questions that encourage the person under stress to express his or her feelings and emotions.
- You are willing to invest time and attention to help.
- Express affection for the person, whether with a warm hug or simply a pat on the arm.
- Be a good listener and show concern and interest.
- Help the person with practical tasks, such as housework, transportation, or responsibilities at work or school.
- Express an understanding about why the person might be upset.