



HOW TO
**BUILD
CONNECTIONS
WITH FAMILY,
FRIENDS &
COMMUNITY**

a guide for first responders
and families

fortemaustralia.org.au



INTRODUCTION

People need people.

Social connection is vital for your psychological wellbeing. Forming long-lasting bonds, sharing valuable resources, and working together in groups - these are basic human needs.

It can be easy to forget how important it is to connect with the people around you. But building the relationships that matter to you is important to do when times are good, so that you're surrounded by support when challenges arise.

It's also tempting to keep to yourself when things aren't going well. But one of the best things you can do following a traumatic experience is to spend time with people who care about you - to feel the social support of friends, family and the community.

The people around you help give you a sense of belonging, a feeling of being loved and cared for and that you are not alone, and reassurance that your reactions are normal. Social connection can also play a protective role in maintaining your wellbeing in the face of repeated exposure to severe stressors.





WHY IS SOCIAL CONNECTION IMPORTANT?

Getting together with the people who are important to you helps to make you feel happier. It also:

- ▶ Increases your satisfaction with life
- ▶ Improves your self-esteem and self-confidence
- ▶ Lowers your stress levels
- ▶ Provides you with support when you need it
- ▶ Helps you develop close relationships with friends, family and others
- ▶ Promotes good health and wellbeing

WHY MIGHT CONNECTIONS TAKE A HIT?

It is common for people's social support networks to be disrupted following a disaster like the bushfires, or going through a traumatic experience.

People may feel too busy sorting things out to spend time socialising, or the places they used to gather may have been destroyed, or group activities discontinued.

Sometimes people avoid others because they do not want to be reminded about what happened, or worry about how someone else is going. And some people just feel too sad and dispirited to bother meeting or talking with others. It can all just feel too hard.

Whatever the reasons for a decrease in social contact with others, rebuilding social connections after a disaster is incredibly important.

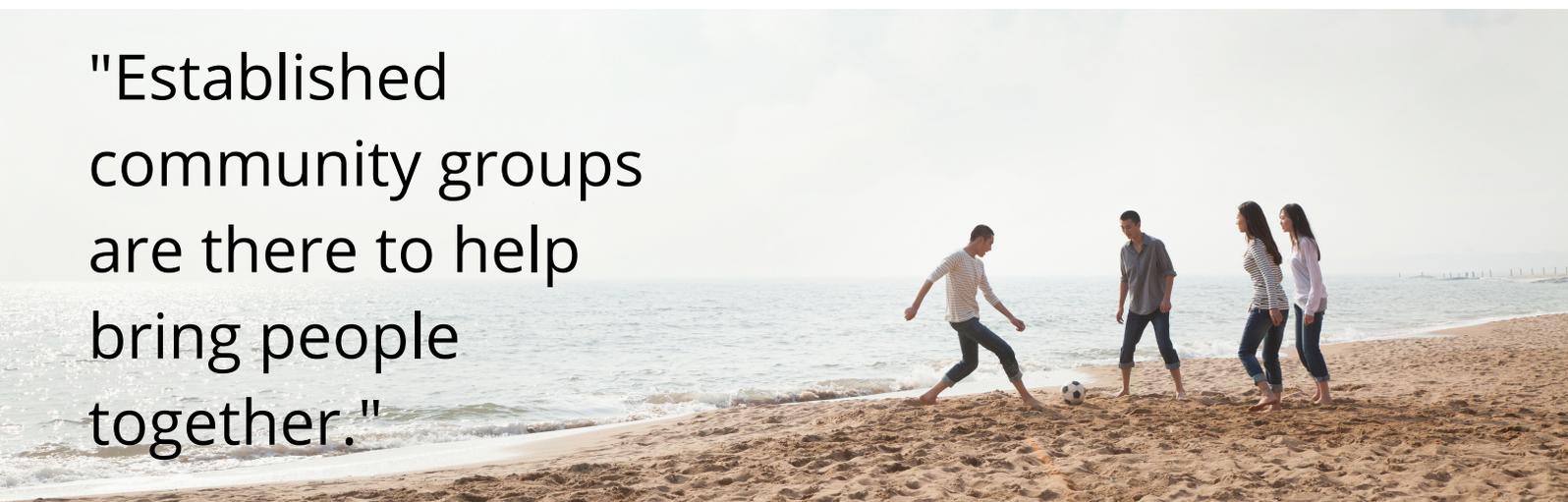
People help give us a sense of belonging, they can share burdens, provide practical support like helping replant gardens and caring for children. They can provide a sympathetic ear when we need to talk, or sensible advice when we are struggling with a problem. They can show us that we are important to them, too.

HOW CAN YOU RECONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Reconnecting can feel hard, but making the effort is worthwhile.

Here are some ideas for reconnecting with the people who are important to you, or creating new connections:

"Established community groups are there to help bring people together."



Start off with a small contact. Call the person you feel closest to and ask if they would like to have a cup of tea or go for a short walk together. Think of the easiest way you can begin to connect, that feels safe and realistic for you.

Be patient. The people you contact may be distracted or feel similarly to you.

Be persistent. Do not give up after your first attempt to reconnect.

Go further afield. You can try make contact over the phone or a video chat with friends who no longer live near you.

Who do you want to talk to? Maybe you could make a time to catch up with a friend who is a good listener.

Feels like too much? If you feel overwhelmed or need to cancel, reschedule another date to help hold you accountable to connecting with the person you have reached out to.

“ Think of the easiest way you can begin to connect, that feels safe and realistic for you. ”

Help someone out. Check if a neighbour or someone in the local community needs your help. Helping others can help makes us feel good.

Use existing groups to make social connections with others. Established community groups are there to help bring people together.

Join an activity. Get in touch with organisations that offer activities that support connection, such as Fortem Australia.



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We support first responder families to
proactively look after their wellbeing and
mental fitness

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