

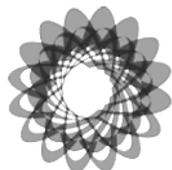
# SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT WORKBOOK



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## INTRODUCTION

Many people who have mental health disabilities have said that they feel isolated, lonely or cut off from other people. Sometimes this is because they feel different from other people and aren't sure whether they will be welcome in regular social settings. Sometimes it is because their disability gets in the way. And sometimes it is because they have spent many years in programs designed for people with mental health problems, and need to be reminded of the other choices in the community.

This is a workbook that is intended to help you, together with a case manager or other support person, increase your participation in social activities in the community. There are many reasons you might want to do this.

- Many people feel best when they are busy and have something meaningful or fun to do with their time.
- Everyone can benefit from having someone in their life to call on when they feel lonely or need help. Increasing your social activity gives you the opportunity to meet other people, who can become sources of companionship or social support for you.
- Many people also find that they feel better about themselves when they can be a source of companionship or social support for another person. It's not just good to have a friend, it's also good to be a friend.
- Your social activities do not have to be limited to what is provided in mental health settings. You can pursue your interests, and meet people who share them, the same way most other people do...and if you do this, you will find many more resources and people out there.
- People who have social supports and companionship, and who participate in activities with others, generally report greater life satisfaction than those who do not.

Whatever your reasons, if you want to increase your social activities, you can! It may be a little bit uncomfortable at first to meet new people or go new places. But like most things, you will get better and more comfortable at it with practice.

An issue as complicated as how to meet and socialize with people is very hard to make simple and straightforward enough to put in a workbook. No workbook will provide the exact right answers for every person. Each person will have different needs, goals and levels of comfort with the process. Hopefully, you will find some questions, advice and exercises here that will help you figure out what you want to do, and how to pursue your own goals.

We hope you will use this workbook with a support person, whether that's a case manager, therapist, ACT team person, peer specialist, trusted friend or family member.

In this workbook, most of the information will be in the middle of the page. In the smaller column on the left will be comments or tips for your support person. In the smaller column on the right will be extra comments or tips for you to think about.

**Q. Why should I use this workbook with another person?**

A. *You could use this workbook by yourself. But...*

- *It may really help to use it with someone who knows you pretty well, and who will give you honest and constructive feedback along the way.*
- *Another person may also help you find the resources in your community to help you pursue your interests.*
- *Another person may be able to tell you what strategies **THEY** have used to get involved with activities and/or meet people and make friends.*

**Q. Do I have to do this **WHOLE** workbook?**

- *No. You and your support person will figure out which parts of this workbook will help you most.*
- *You will probably benefit from using the main activities in this book (pages 4 to 12 ). The other sections have extra information that you can pick and choose from, depending on what you need.*



**TIP:** It is ok to encourage the person to discuss issues raised in this workbook with **OTHER** people as well.

**TIP:** Look at the list of contents on the next page to see what sections you might be interested in.

Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** Make sure the person knows what to expect. Help them explore the workbook and answer their questions about the process.

**THE MAIN PROCESS**

This workbook leads you through a process that looks like this:

**1 – Self Assessment (pgs. 4-8)**

This is where you take time to look at

- how much you currently participate in social activities
- how satisfied you are with that
- what you are interested in
- what your strengths and skills are
- what might get in your way
- what might help you

**2 – Identifying Goals (pg. 9)**

This is where you get think and talk about what you want...both in the “big picture” (like what you want out of life) and in the “small picture” (like what activities you might like to try). In this stage you will also have to prioritize your goals, putting them in order of importance to you, and deciding what to take on first.

**3 – Making a Plan (pgs. 10-11)**

This is where you figure out exactly what steps you are going to take, and when you are going to take them. At this point, you will be planning for success, thinking about what problems might come up and how you will handle them.

**4 – Taking Action (pg. 12)**

This is where you will DO the steps in your plan, and give it a try. Whatever happens, the experience will teach you important lessons.

**5 – Follow-up (pg. 12)**

This is where you talk over what happened with your support person, and figure out what worked, what didn’t, and what you want to do next.

Also, there is a **WORKSHEET** after page 12 where you can keep track of all of this. It’s a good idea to make extra blank copies of the worksheet so that you have a place to write down any changes or additions you want to make.

**AFTER** the part of the workbook that leads you through this process, there are sections with information about

**GATHERING INFORMATION (pgs. 13-14)**

**SOCIAL / RELATIONSHIP SKILLS (pgs. 15-18)**

**THE WORLD ONLINE (pgs. 19-20)**

**DATING AND ROMANCE (pgs. 20-23)**

And **SEXUALITY (pg. 23)**

You can read these at any time to help you with any other part of the workbook.

User TIPS

**TIP:** It’s a good idea to have someone who knows you well help you with the self-assessment.



**TIP:** Sometimes things change, and you may decide to change your goals or your plan. That’s fine.

Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** While it is important to cover all the assessment areas, it is not necessary to be strict about the order. Be prepared to follow the person’s conversational direction.

**TIP:** If most social activities are in the context of MH services, check to see if the person has opportunities for other experiences or wants to.

**1- SELF-ASSESSMENT**

This section of the workbook will help make it clear where you are starting from and where you would like to go. Each section has questions intended to help you reflect and explore. You can use these to have a conversation with your support person. If you are doing this by yourself, use a notebook to jot down your answers.

**a. Current participation in activities.**

- What do you do for fun?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- How much time do you spend alone?
- Are there any people you spend time with or talk to pretty often? Who are they?
- Do you do anything that gives you a chance to be around people?
- Do you use any community resources or participate in any community-based activities? (e.g. use the library, participate in local sports league, or community gardening, etc..)
- Do you participate in a church, synagogue, mosque or any other spiritual community?
- Are you a member of any other group? (e.g. veterans, neighborhood watch, interest-based group, arts organization, etc.)
- Do you volunteer in the community at all?

**List any current social participation on the worksheet.**

**b. Current satisfaction.**

Think about your current activities and ways of interacting with people.

- Are you happy with your current amount of social participation?
- Are you happy with how often you interact with other people?
- Are you satisfied with level of companionship and social support you have in your life?
- If you imagine your social life and activities exactly how you want it to be, what would it look like? What would be the same? What would be different?

User TIPS



**TIP:** If it’s hard to answer these questions, think about how you spend an average week. What do you do each day?

**TIP:** you may want to go through each thing listed and think about how satisfied you are with each of your current activities.

**Sometimes people recognize when they feel dissatisfied but have a hard time figuring out what would help. Here are some questions to help you sort it out.**

- Do you feel isolated or lonely? Would it help to have more chances to meet people? Do you have chances to meet people, but have trouble knowing how to make friends?
- Do you know people, but wish you could have closer friendships with them?
- Is it hard to know what you might be interested in doing? Would you like help exploring your interests?
- Would you like to have more fun or meet more people doing the activities you are already doing?

**On the worksheet, rate your satisfaction with your current level of social participation. Make notes about any areas of particular satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and changes you'd like to make.**

**c. Your Interests**

Make a list of things you are interested in doing.

What do you like to do?

What activities might you like to try?

What have you always wanted to learn about, try or do? What did you want to do when you were a kid?

Are there certain types of people you would like to be able to meet?

If you can answer these questions, **jot down your answers on the worksheet.** If you're not sure, maybe these categories and examples will help generate some ideas:

- **Physical Interests:** participating in a sports team, watching sports events, dancing (specific styles, or general social), exercise (gym-based or not), yoga or tai chi, biking, frisbee, other recreational games.
- **Lifestyle / life cycle interests:** interest in dating, parenting issues, g/l/b/t community, family reunion.
- **Outdoors and nature:** hiking, camping, fishing, birdwatching, gardening

**TIP:** This is not an exhaustive list... just a place to start...



**TIP:** These are just SOME possibilities. If you think of others, that's fine! Go with it!



## Supporter TIPS



- Creative Arts/Crafts: Creating/playing music, participating in theater/drama, visual arts (drawing, painting), making things (sculpture, pottery, quilting, sewing, woodworking, etc.), poetry/writing, cooking.
- Cultural Activities: Going to museums, concerts, movies, neighborhood cultural events/festivals (e.g. Odunde, Cinco de Mayo), involvement in a particular cultural/ethnic community center.
- Educational: Learning about something in particular or taking classes, reading and discussion, debate, politics, adult education classes,
- Civic Participation / Service: Neighborhood organizations, get out the vote, park clean-up, volunteering at local organizations (e.g. library, nursing home, hospital), local politics, activism around a particular issue.
- Spiritual / Religious : being part of a religious community (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.), attending services or community events, religious or spiritual study groups, religious school teaching
- Social Activities: parties, dances, clubs, sororities/fraternities, singles groups, interest-based social groups, picnics.
- Support: 12-step groups, Al-Anon, peer support groups (mh), support groups related to any particular identity, role or issue.

**Write down anything that appeals to you on the worksheet. Talk them over with your support person.**

## User TIPS



Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** It may be helpful to reflect your own observations about their strengths and challenges. Remember, it is from the strengths that the best solutions will come!

**TIP:** Reassure the person that you can help them deal with whatever the barriers are. It may take some time and practice, but if they want to overcome these, they can certainly be helped to do so.

**d. Your Skills and Strengths.**

When it comes to meeting and interacting with people, what are you good at? What do you think are your strengths? What do other people say are your strengths?

When it comes to meeting and interacting with people, what is hard for you? What kinds of problems have you had?

**Write your answers to these questions down on your worksheet.**

**e. Possible Barriers.**

Are there things that get in your way, and make it harder to participate and/or meet people? It can help to think about this so that you can get any help you might need and plan for success!

Here are some things that people may struggle with. Discuss each of these with your support person and figure out which of these, if any, are barriers for you. **Make notes on your worksheet about barriers that concern you.**

- Information- Are you confused about how to find the information you need? Are you not sure where to start?
- Access- Do you have any trouble related to transportation? Is it hard for you to get to the places you might like to go?
- Worries- Are you anxious about trying something new? Are you very shy or nervous around new people?
- Bad experiences- Have you had bad experiences with people or activities in the past that make it hard to try again?
- Social expectations- Do you feel like you don't know the right ways to act in a particular situation?
- Mental health issues- Do you have disabilities that make it harder to get along with other people? Do you need help figuring out how to manage your perceptions, feelings or behaviors?
- Medication side effects- Do you take medicine that helps you in some ways but causes other problems?
- Physical health issues- Do you have any health issues that make it hard for you to get around or do things?
- Energy level- Do you have trouble getting up and getting going? Is it hard for you to get out of the house?
- Discrimination- Have you experienced discrimination because of your disability? Are you worried about that happening again? What about other kinds of discrimination?
- Are there any other barriers that get in the way of your participating in groups or activities with other people?

User TIPS

**TIP:** Remember that your support person is offering their observations about you in order to **HELP** you move forward.

**TIP:** Remember that the point of going over all of these barriers is to prepare to overcome them! Try not to be discouraged... there are ways to handle ALL of these barriers!



## 6. Strategies and Resources

For each of the barriers that you wrote down, take a few minutes to think of strategies that might help.

- What are strategies that you've used before that worked?
- What strategies have you heard about that other people used?
- What do you think might help?

**Write down the strategies you think you might want to use.**

Now think about your resources. Some resources are things you have like a phone, a car, money. Some resources are qualities you have like being creative, brave or friendly. And some resources are people in your life who can help you.

- What do you **HAVE** (things) that might be a resource as you move towards participating in more activities?
- What do you **HAVE** (qualities) that might help you?
- Who are the people who can provide encouragement, help, or support?

**Write these down too.**



**TIP:** Help the person articulate what they want and write it down.



**TIP:** Acknowledge the broader goals, and help the person get more and more specific. If they get stuck, it is probably because they don't know how to narrow it down. You might help by asking clarifying questions. You can offer suggestions and ask what they think. Be careful to avoid directing them towards what YOU think they should do.

### Setting Goals

As you start to plan ways to participate in activities with other people, the first thing you need to do is decide what you WANT. Look back over your self-assessment notes. Hopefully through this process some ideas have become clear about what you want. Once you set your goals, you can identify the steps needed to reach them, and then proceed one step at a time.

- Go back and look at what you are ALREADY doing . Are you getting what you want out of that? Do you want to do more of it?
- Are there ways you might be able to expand on something you are already doing? (e.g. take a solitary activity and find a group to do it with – such as walking or watching a movie).
- Do you want to try something new?
- What do you want to get out of your participation in a new activity?

Think about the long term picture... what do you want in your life that could benefit from participation in social activities?

**write this down on your worksheet**

Then think about the short term picture... what do you want to DO?

Some guidelines for setting goals:

- They should be do-able. Set yourself up for success as much as possible.
- They should be very specific. That way, you know what you're aiming for, and when it is accomplished.
- Prioritize your goals...decide which are most important.
- Set only a few goals at a time, maybe even just one.

**write this down on your worksheet**

Then think in terms of things that you could do, or start to do, in the next two months.

**write this down on your worksheet**

**TIP:** Remember that setting goals is not a one-time thing. Goals should help you focus on pursuing something you want. YOU decide what your goals are, and you can change them if you want to. As you go forward, you may decide to change your goal, or add a goal to your plan.

**3- MAKING A PLAN**

Now that you've identified your goals, list some first steps for each. Think about how much time each step might take and include that in your plan.

Example

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Goal:

To make one friend who shares my interest in birds within the next 6 months.

Steps:

1. Find out if there are any local birdwatching groups near me.  
(2 weeks)
  2. If there are, find out when their meetings or outings are.  
(1 week)
  3. Go to a meeting/outing and see what it's like.  
(depends on their schedule)
- =====

As you can see from the example, you might want to change your plan if it turns out that any step doesn't work. If there are no local birdwatching groups, this person would need to revise the whole plan. And if that's what happens, that's ok. The plan is a roadmap, and sometimes we need to seek a different pathway to the same place.

*What are some steps you can take to reach your own goal?*

*Keep each step small and do-able.*

**Write the steps on your worksheet.**

### Thinking ahead

As you go forward to do the steps you have outlined, it is important to think ahead about things that might get in your way. If you think ahead, sometimes you can solve problems even before they happen!

**TIP:** Help the person review the list that was generated in the “barriers” section to see if any of those present a problem to the current plan.

Think about the steps you have planned...are there any problems that might come up?

- Do you know where to find the information you need?
- Is transportation an issue?
- Do you have enough money to do what you have planned? Can cheaper alternatives be found?
- Are there skills needed to do this? Do you need help with any of those skills? (e.g. introducing yourself, meeting people, making conversation, knowing how much to share/not share about yourself, etc.)
- Do you expect to be nervous about doing this? If so, what plan can you put in place to help you manage the anxiety?
- Are you worried about having a bad experience?



**TIP:** Help keep the attention on strategies. Barriers can be overwhelming.

If any of these is true, or if you expect any other problems, make your plan so that it includes strategies for dealing with the problems. Take a moment to go back and notice the things you listed as your potential barriers, and also look at your strengths and resources. Are there ways you can use your strengths to your advantage here?

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Example: I know where the book club meets, and I’d like to go, but I’m nervous about being with people I don’t know. I’m worried that my anxiety will make it a bad experience for me.

Strategy 1: Identify someone who will go with you the first time (or few times) until the experience becomes familiar and you are less nervous.

OR

Strategy 2: See if you can go once or twice as an observer before joining.

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**TIP:** Keep the focus on what you can DO, what you can try, who can help you, etc.

**Write down any concerns you have, or problems you are worried about, and ALSO write down your strategies for dealing with them. Remember, you can always change or add to this later.**

Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** Make sure to provide ample encouragement and positive reinforcement for every effort!

#### 4- TAKING ACTION

This is the part where you actually DO what you have planned. Go ahead and give it a try. Call on your support person for encouragement, or if you run into any unexpected problems. When you have completed a step, let your support person know.

#### 5- FOLLOW UP

##### **Learning from each experience.**

Whenever you take steps and try something, you have a chance to learn from the experience. Whether you had a great time or an awful time, whether it was easy or hard, whether it went smoothly or there were a lot of problems...there is something you can learn that can help you move forward. Take a moment to congratulate yourself! Acknowledge and appreciate the effort you made.

Now, take some time to reflect on what happened. It can help to talk this over with your support person.

- What went well? What would you say was successful or made it worthwhile?
- What was hard or challenging? How did you deal with that?
- Would you want to do this again? Are there parts of it you'd rather avoid?
- How can you use this information as you plan your next steps?

**Use this information to fill in the “How did it go?” section of the worksheet. Make sure to make notes about any lessons you want to make sure to carry forward for next time.**

Congratulate yourself! You are doing it! Continue this process as long as you want to .... until you feel like you can do it all on your own. If you are already doing it on your own, remember that if you get stuck or discouraged, you can ask your support person for help any time you need it.

**USE THE NEXT SECTIONS OF THE WORKBOOK TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GATHERING INFORMATION, FINDING NEW WAYS TO MEET PEOPLE, DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS AND DEVELOPING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.**

User TIPS

**TIP:** DOING what you said you wanted is more important than the planning. There is no substitute. Remember that you have good planning and support on your side....and go for it!

If you are developing new interests, it can be tricky to find out how to get involved. But there are some good places to start. Sometimes all the information will be in one place. Other times, you might need to follow clues until you find what you're looking for. Here are some ways to get started.

### **Networking – making use of people you know**

- IF you know people with similar interests, ask them what **THEY** do and what activities they know about. You can also ask them what it is like to participate in that activity. You might also ask if they would be willing for you to come along some time.
- Even if you don't know people who share your interests, you can talk about your own interests and desire to find activities. Someone you know might know someone else with more information.
- If you are receiving services from an agency, ask your service provider if they have any ideas. It may be that there is someone in the agency whose job it is to collect information about community resources and activities.

**TIP:** Just talking about your interests with people you know can sometimes yield information from unexpected sources.



**TIP:** Be alert to literacy issues. Most information gathering involves reading and/or writing. Be prepared to help with this if necessary.

### **Publications and TV**

- You can find lots of information in ordinary places. Newspapers, especially local neighborhood newspapers, often have listings of activities and events that are happening every week.
- You might see programs or ads on TV with information you are seeking., or hear them on the radio, especially local channels,
- Your neighborhood might have places, such as bulletin boards where people hang posters about things that are going on. Neighborhood supermarkets, schools, libraries, bookstores or diners, are good places to keep your eyes open for this. Or there might be special places in your area, such as community centers, that would have this sort of place.
- Try looking in the phone book (yellow pages) for stores or clubs that are related to your interest.
- Some topics, especially things that are like hobbies, have their own magazines and newsletters. Try a local bookstore or shop that carries a wide variety of magazines.

## Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** If the person has no computer skills, help them find a learning resource.

## The “Web”

- If you have access to the Internet via a computer, this can be a tremendous resource. There is public access to computers at most local libraries, if you don't have access to a computer in another way. Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) (or some other search engine) and enter some words related to your interest and your location and see what comes up.
- Most likely, you will get more information than you know what to do with OR you will get information that is not quite right. If you're not sure how to narrow your search down so that you get the information you want, ask for help from someone with more computer experience.
- You may need to follow up with a phone call or email to find out answers to specific questions. If someone has put an email or phone number on the website, it is ok to contact them.
- Sometimes you may encounter a website that is very old and outdated, so that the information is no longer valid.

### Other kinds of information:

- In some cases, you might want more information about what it's like to go to a particular event or activity. If there is a contact person listed, you can ask them about it. They can usually tell you things like whether or not it is very important to be on time, whether it's ok to bring a friend, whether it is a group used to dealing with new people, etc.
- Another option is to talk with someone else who has been to that activity or event before and ask them for their impressions of the group.
- If you need help figuring out how to get there, you can ask a contact person if there is one. You can also contact the public transportation authority in your area for help getting there on public transit. If you have internet access, you can get directions using Mapquest.com or some other similar web-based service. Or, as always, ask someone who has been there before.
- In some kinds of groups, there are rules to follow. Some of those rules are written down and others may be informal, and just understood by people who participate over time. It's always a good idea to ask if there are any rules or guidelines you should be aware of. If you are someone who has trouble picking up informal social rules, it may be especially important for you to find someone to ask ahead of time.

## User TIPS



**TIP:** If you don't know how to use computers, and want to learn, most communities have ways to get you started. Ask someone you know to help.

**TIP:** Help the person reflect on their social skills. What are their strengths? What areas need development?

Participating in social activities and events may push you to develop your social skills in new ways. This will be different for each person, depending on what skills you already have, and what new activities you are choosing to do. It can be helpful to discuss this with your support person, and together figure out if there are skills you want to practice – either before you start the new activity or as you start to participate (using the activity as a place to practice).

Below are some common skills that are important in many settings.

### **Handling Discomfort**

- Most people are uncomfortable at first when trying something new or meeting new people. This is normal. You'll have to decide for yourself how much discomfort you can handle, and for how long. Plan what to do if you feel too uncomfortable.
- Just as you might feel uncomfortable with others, they might feel uncomfortable with you at first too. This is also normal. It may or may not have anything to do with you personally. Some people are just shy or nervous. It may take a little bit of time for them to figure out how to interact with you.
- The bottom line is that in order to do new things, anyone has to be prepared to stretch a little bit beyond their comfort zone. This is why it's good to have a support person who you can talk to as you do this.

### **Meeting new people**

- Introductions
  - Usually the first thing that happens when you meet a new person one-on-one is introductions. This involves saying hello, and finding out each others' names. Sometimes, it might also include exchanging other relevant information. In many settings, people include in their introductions something about what kind of work they do. In the context of a topic-specific group, it might also make sense to include something about your interest or background with that topic.

**TIP:** Review your self - assessment. Do you know what social skills you are good at, and which ones need more practice?

## Example:

“Hi, I’m Sarah.” / “I’m Dave. Nice to meet you.” / “Nice to meet you too, Dave. I haven’t seen you here before, are you new?” / “Yes. This is my first time here. How about you?” / “I’ve been attending for a while... I really like this book discussion group. The people have really interesting things to say.” / “Great. I’m glad I came.”

- Conversation

A big part of getting to know people is having conversations. But it can be hard to know how to get started. One good thing about choosing your activities based on your interests is that you know you have something in common with the other people there. Talking about shared interests is always a possibility for conversation.

Or you can make “small talk” about other shared experiences like the weather, or what it was like to travel to the group meeting.

- If someone else starts a conversation, you can listen and respond.
- Ideally, a conversation goes back and forth with both/all participants having a chance to speak and to listen. Try to notice how the conversation is going, and think about whether the balance of listening and speaking is comfortable for you both.

- How much to share

- In general, talk about things you have in common with the person/people you are meeting, and listen to the kinds of things they are talking about. This will give you some clues about how much to share about yourself.
- It is a good guideline to keep personal information to your self at first. Your psychiatric disability, medical issues, intimate relationships and/or personal problems are things you can share with trusted friends, but is usually too much information to share with someone you’ve just met.

- Inviting someone to join you

- If you want to invite someone to do something with you, you should pay attention to a few things:
  - Ask the person whether they’d like to join you, don’t tell them. Make sure it is ok for them to say “no”. For example: “I’m going for a walk in the park, would you like to come along?” and not “You should walk with me in the park.” When inviting someone, be very clear what you are inviting them to do, and stick to that. If you

**TIP:** Be prepared to help the person practice any of these...

**TIP:** Ask your support person to help you role-play introductions, conversations, invitations, or any other social situation you need practice with.



have finished the walk in the park and want to go for a cup o of coffee, ask that separately.

- Listen to what the person says in response to your invitation. If they say “No, thanks”, you must respect that. If they say “maybe another time”, assume that they mean what they said, and ask another time if you want to.
- Remember that people may have other appointments or responsibilities. Sometimes, a person may need to plan activities in advance. You may need to ask today for someone to go to a movie with you next week.



### **Friendship Skills**

- The most important thing to remember about friendship is that it is a two-way street. Really good friendships involve give and take from both friends.
- The best way to make a good friend is to BE a good friend. This means offering support, listening, and doing things your friend likes to do. In return you may expect similar kindness from your friend.
- This may mean that you compromise what you want sometimes and let your friend have his/her way... and another time, they will do that for you.
- Good friendships, like all good relationships, are built on honesty and clear communication. If you are happy about something, say so. If you appreciate your friend, let them know. If you want or need something from your friend, make sure to communicate this. Don't assume your friend knows what you want or need.
- You will need to figure out how much contact, and what kind of contact, is right for each person who is becoming your friend. Make sure to pay attention to this. It is a good idea for you to say what YOUR preferences are, and to listen to what the other person wants too. Some things to think about are how long it's ok to talk on the phone, what time is the best time to call, what times are too late or too early, how often and where to get together, etc. If you're not sure, then ask.

Supporter TIPS

**TIP:** Help the person think about boundaries that THEY set, and recognize boundaries set by others.

**Boundaries** are important in all relationships. It is important to know YOUR boundaries – that is where your limits are – and those of the other person. Good friends respect each others’ boundaries. If someone is asking you to do something you don’t feel comfortable with or ready for, you should say “no” (set a boundary) and they should respect that. And if someone asks you not to call after 9 pm, you should respect that. Respecting boundaries creates a sense of trust and safety in a relationship. Be very careful about borrowing or lending money or things that are valuable, until you are sure you trust a person. If someone is always borrowing from you or asking you for favors, ask yourself if you are being treated fairly and if you are getting as much as you are giving in the relationship. If the answer is “no”, you may want to set some boundaries.

User TIPS



**Safety**

When going new places and meeting new people, it is important to be open to new possibilities and at the same time, pay attention to your own safety.

- Make sure you know how to get where you're going. Pay attention to public transportation schedules and fares to make sure you don't get stranded somewhere with no way home. If it would help you to feel more comfortable, practice traveling to and from the place at a time when it is light out, or when someone can go with you.
- Whenever you go to a new place, have a plan for leaving and getting home safely. If you're uncomfortable or find out that this group or activity just isn't for you, you can always just leave.
- When meeting a new person one-on-one, ALWAYS meet in a public place where there will be other people. This could be a library, a public landmark, a movie theater, a store, a coffee shop or any other place where there will be other people around. Do not meet the person at their house or at a place that is isolated away from other people, and do not invite them to your home either. Most people are nice and will not harm you. But until you know and trust the person you are meeting, it is better to be safe.
- Similarly, keep detailed information about where you work and live private at first. If someone asks where you live, you can tell them your neighborhood without saying your address, for instance. Wait until you know someone and feel like you can trust them before giving out this sort of information. You may want to keep your phone number private too, if it is linked to an address.

**TIP:** These are part of establishing and maintaining boundaries.

**TIP:** Do you have any safety concerns? Discuss them with your support person.

**THE WORLD ONLINE**

Many people find they like making connections with people online. People with psychiatric disabilities, in particular, have mentioned that it helps them to have the “buffer” that is created by only dealing with the limited information that comes through in an email or online chat. It can be a great tool for meeting people, especially because there are no limits imposed by location and transportation. If you have access to a computer and the web, there is a wide open world of ways to find people who share your interests, and to find online communities to be part of, organized around any issue or topic you can imagine.

**TIPS:** If you can, show the person examples of each of these.

There are a few different formats for interacting with people online, including:

- **Message Boards:** These are like bulletin boards where each person posts their messages for all readers to see. In order to read or post, you have to go to the website where the message board is located.
- **Email lists:** These are conversations that happen by email. One person posts, and the email is sent to everyone on the list. The conversation comes to you in your email box. Sometimes, these generate too much conversation, and can fill your email box with more than you can read. Some email lists are available in “digest” form, and send you one email each day that contains all of the emails from that day.
- **Online chat:** This is live interaction, in which people talk to each other by typing. In a “chat room”, there can be many people talking all at the same time, and their comments will appear as they are typed. This can make for some very fast paced conversation that can be hard to follow. People can also chat privately, that is one-on-one, and have a conversation back and forth. “Instant Messaging” is like this as well.

**Online Safety and Guidelines**

Anonymity and distance make meeting people online a little bit easier for some people, but it also raises some safety concerns. The reality is that you don’t know who you are having a conversation with. All you have to go on is their words on the screen. Just like the rest of the world, there are mostly nice people out there, but there are also some predators who are looking for vulnerable people to take advantage of.

- Take your time getting to know someone online. Be friendly, but be careful.
- Do not EVER give out personal information like your computer password, social security number, credit card



**TIP:** If you don't know how to do these things, take the time to learn along with the person you are supporting.

numbers, or other information that could be used to get into your money or computer.

- Learn how to use anti-virus software, firewalls, and how to report someone who is harassing you.
- You may want to wait until you trust the person before even giving them your real name. If you are at all unsure, do not give out your phone number or address. Maintain contact by email.
- Set boundaries about how and when you are willing to be in contact. Be very careful with anyone who doesn't seem to respect these boundaries. Make sure you listen to and respect the boundaries of others.
- If you ever decide you want to meet an online friend in person, make sure you meet in a public place where there will be other people around.

### **“MORE THAN FRIENDS” – Dating and Romance**

If you are interested in dating, romantic, or intimate relationships, this is normal. Most adults want these kinds of relationships. If you have had trouble figuring out where to meet someone, how to approach someone, or how to know if someone is a good match for you....guess what? That's normal too. Most adults struggle with this, regardless of disability. Relationships are complicated. Here are some suggestions that may help you if you are interested in dating or becoming romantically involved with someone.

#### **Meeting people**

Everyone is a stranger until you get to know them. So how do you meet someone who might be someone you would like to date, who would like to date you?

- If you are involved in activities that interest you, and you meet someone that way, you can start off knowing that you share that interest. This can be something to build on.
- Lots of people meet through involvement with a community of some kind. For example, lots of people meet through involvement in a church or other religious community. Other places to meet people might include neighborhood groups, support groups, social clubs, etc.
- It is important to know what you are looking for in a relationship. Do you want companionship? Are you interested in a sexual relationship? Be honest with yourself, and with those you meet, about what is important to you.



- Some people meet through personal ads in newspapers or online. This gives you a chance to have phone conversations or exchange letters or email before meeting in person, to see if it is a relationship you would like to pursue. Pay attention to what a person says they are seeking, to see if it is the same as what you want.
- Lots of people meet someone to date through other friends.
- There is an online service that is especially for people with psychiatric disabilities and mental health issues. The person who started this service knew how hard it is, and offers some very good advice on the website. [www.nolongerlonely.com](http://www.nolongerlonely.com)
- If you know someone as a friend first, before getting romantically involved, you will have some idea of their personality and lifestyle, and whether this person is a good match for you.

**Once you have met someone...**

- Do yourself a favor and take it slowly. Close relationships require trust, and trust is built over time.
- Get to know the person. Let them get to know you. Ask questions. Answer their questions.
- Spend time together. Do things together that you both enjoy. Pay attention to how it feels to be with the person. Are you comfortable? Is your date comfortable?
- Be careful. Listen to your gut feelings about the person. Also listen to the feelings of those people who care about you.
- You may be attracted to someone because they are friendly or talented or smart or beautiful. But getting along with someone over time involves other ordinary things like how much time they have, what they like to do, how they treat you (and others), their values and priorities, etc. Pay attention to compatibility as well as attraction.



## Healthy Relationships

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and care. Nobody deserves to be hurt or treated cruelly. Whether it's a friend, family member or romantic partner, no one should be hurting you or putting you down.

- If someone is treating you in a way that hurts or upsets you, you have to tell them to stop.
- If someone does not listen to you when you tell them to stop, they are not respecting your limits and they are not respecting YOU.
- If you do not listen when someone else tells you to stop, you are not respecting THEM.
- If you are in a relationship (any kind of relationship) with someone who often hurts you or puts you down, you should think carefully about whether this is a relationship you want to continue. Even if you love each other, it can be an unhealthy relationship.
- It can also be a unhealthy if one partner controls the other partner all the time, or takes advantage of them.
- If you are in a relationship where you often hurt the other person, put them down, control or take advantage of them, you may be doing serious damage to them and to yourself.
- These are warning signs of abuse, and should be taken very seriously, no matter which side you are on.

There are agencies and services available to help people who are in abusive relationships. Also, you should discuss this with your other trusted support people and get their help in figuring out what to do.

**TIP:** Be alert to the warning signs of exploitative or abusive relationships. If you notice this, discuss it with the person and tell them what you see.

**TIP:** Your support person can help you sort out whether someone is treating you right.

**Sex and sexuality**

**TIP:** Pay attention to your own comfort levels in talking about sex.

It's normal for people to be interested in having a sex life. It is a very personal issue, and each person feels differently about what they want, how much they want, and how important it is compared to other things in life. It can be hard to find support for figuring this out, since a lot of people are uncomfortable talking about sex. Some folks aren't used to thinking of people with mental health problems as having an interest in sex. And sometimes psychiatric medications reduce people's interest in or ability to engage in sexual activity.

Here are some important points:

- Sexual activity should be between adults who agree to be having sexual contact with each other. This includes even sexual talking, kissing, and touching. So it is important to check your understanding with any sexual partners.
- Take care of yourself and your partner by making sure you know about contraception (preventing pregnancy). It is also important to know how to keep from getting or passing on sexually transmitted diseases.
- It is a good idea to ask your doctor to run tests to find out if you are carrying any diseases that might be sexually transmitted (such as HIV, Hepatitis C, herpes, etc.). This way you can learn your status and find out what you need to do to take care of yourself and any partners you might have.
- It is also important to ask any sexual partner if they have been tested, and discuss strategies for keeping risks as low as possible. It can be hard to do this "in the heat of the moment". Please realize that this can be a serious health issue.
- All of the other cautions and safety tips above also apply to sexual relationships.
- If you have had experiences of sexual abuse or assault, or physical abuse in your past, it can really affect you very deeply. It can affect your level of trust of other people, your level of interest in intimate relationships, and your ability to make safe and healthy choices. It is very important to understand how your past experiences affect you today. If you haven't already addressed these issues in your life, it is a very good idea to do so with an experienced counselor.

**TIP:** Many people with psychiatric disabilities also have trauma histories. Make sure you know the local resources for help.



**TIP:** Be honest with yourself- do you know what you need to know about sexually transmitted diseases? (STD's)  
If you have ANY questions, ask your support person to help you find out what you need to know!!

## **SOCIAL PARTICIPATION WORKSHEET**

Name:

Date:

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

a. Current participation:

b. Current satisfaction:

c. Interests:

d. Skills / Strengths:

e. Possible Barriers:

f. Strategies and Resources:

### **IDENTIFYING GOALS**

a. Long-term goals:

b. Short-term goals:

c. What do I want to do first?:

(over)

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION WORKSHEET

# MAKING A PLAN

a. Write down your action plan. Write down each step separately. Be very specific, and include dates/time frames.

STEPS

when?

b. Thinking ahead... write down any concerns you have or problems you are worried about. For each one, write down your strategies for handling them.

Concerns / problems

Strategies

Concerns / problems	Strategies

FOLLOW UP:      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What happened?

What did you learn from the experience?

What do you want to do next?