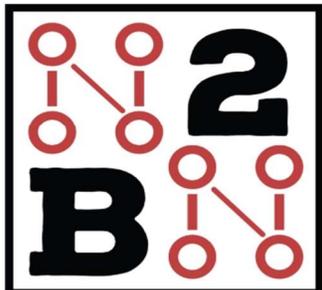


# MATTERING TOOLKIT



Creating  
environments  
where  
everyone  
matters



**NEED TO  
BE NEEDED**  
A Disability & Rehabilitation  
Documentation Project  
Funding #:  
90DPCp0011-01-00



Temple University  
**Collaborative**  
On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities



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This document was developed for the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities. The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPCp0011-01-00). NIDILRR is a center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Service (\*HHS). The contents of this document do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Thank you to the Collaborative Staff, especially Dr. Bryan McCormick and Dr. Gretchen Snethen.

Suggested Citation: Neumann, T. (2024). *Mattering Toolkit: Creating environments where everyone matters*. Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities.

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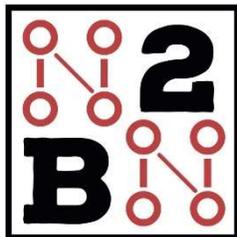
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### **Need To Be Needed**

A Disability & Rehabilitation Research Project  
Presented by the Temple University  
Collaborative on Community Inclusion

June 2024

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## Introduction

One fundamental need of being human, which combines our personal development, social relationships, and community engagement, is *the need to feel that we matter*. It includes the feeling of being valued, appreciated, and respected by those around us. When we feel like we matter, we are important not only in our own eyes but also in the eyes of the people around us.<sup>1,2</sup> This basic human need serves as the cornerstone for our sense of self-worth and belonging and influences every aspect of our personal and communal lives.

**Mattering is important for our own development, our social connections and our connections to the community.**

But what does it truly mean to matter? At its core, mattering is the intersection, where feeling valued by others meets our desire to contribute to something bigger. It embodies a dual aspect: the sense of being valued by others and, in turn, the ability to add value to the lives of those around us. This give-and-take relationship makes mattering such a complex concept and highlights the importance of mutual relationships at an individual and communal level.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

<sup>2</sup> Flett, G. L. (2022). An Introduction, Review, and Conceptual Analysis of Mattering as an Essential Construct and an Essential Way of Life. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 40(1), 3-36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211057640>

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, M., & McCullough, B. C. (1981). Mattering: Inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in Community & Mental Health*, 2, 163-182.

The feeling that we matter has many positive implications. Mattering acts as a protective shield against loneliness, elevates our sense of self-worth, and increases our feeling of belonging within a community<sup>1</sup>. As we navigate through various stages of life, the meaning of mattering can change but mattering remains relevant, as it contributes to our mental health, resilience against adversity, and the motivation to pursue one's life goals.<sup>2,3</sup>



In this document we explore the definition of mattering, its significance, and impact across the lifespan. We also discuss how mattering can be nurtured and provide a Mattering Toolkit for enhancing mattering at a personal level and in community life. As we unfold the layers of mattering, we invite you to reflect on its presence in your life and the lives of those around you, encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of this fundamental human need.

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<sup>1</sup> Flett, G. L., & Zangeneh, M. (2020). Mattering as a vital support for people during the COVID-19 pandemic: The benefits of feeling and knowing that someone cares during times of crisis. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*, 2(1).

<sup>2</sup> Myers, J. E., & Degges-White, S. (2007). Aging well in an upscale retirement community: the relationships among perceived stress, mattering, and wellness. *AdultspanJournal*, 6(2), 96

<sup>3</sup> Flett, G. L. (2018). *The psychology of mattering : Understanding the human need to be significant* / Gordon L. Flett. London, United Kingdom: Academic Press.

## Section I - What is Mattering?

Mattering is a key part of how we connect with others and achieve things in life. It links our personal growth, relationships, and community roles. To understand it fully, let's explore what it means to truly matter.

### The Essence of Mattering

Mattering is the feeling we have when we know that people care about us—not just any people, but those whose opinions we value. We realize that our presence makes a difference in their lives. This feeling isn't just about being liked or noticed; it's deeper. Mattering is about being essential to others in a way that adds meaning to our lives as well as theirs. This mutual value is what makes mattering a two-way street: We feel valued and we add value. As displayed in *Figure 1*, mattering incorporates three key aspects: awareness, importance and reliance.<sup>1</sup> When we feel like we matter, other people not only see us and pay attention to us, but treat us with respect, letting us know that we are important to them. Additionally, others rely on us and require our help to achieve certain goals. Therefore, we would be missed if we were no longer here.

**"Feeling recognized, acknowledged, included and respected for who we are or what we know provides us with dignity. It's what makes us feel human."**

Prilleltenski (2020)



*Figure 1: The three key concepts of mattering (adapted from Elliot et al, 2004)*

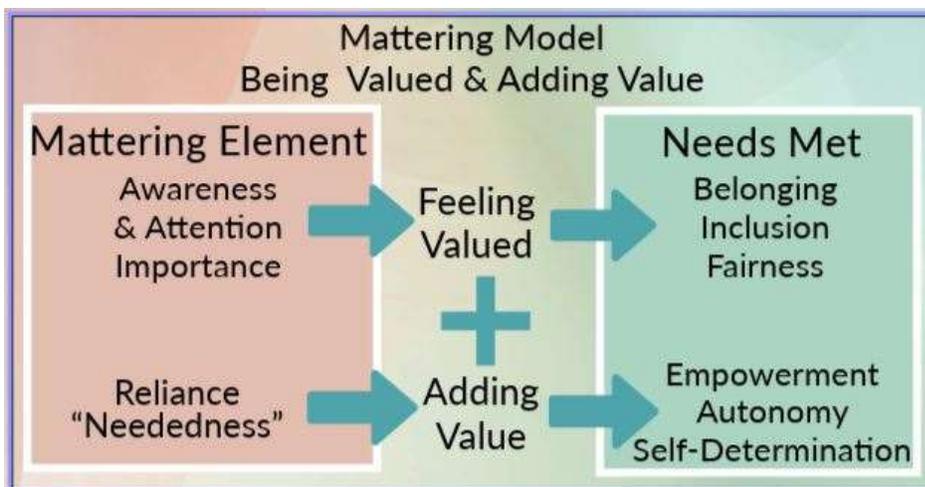
<sup>1</sup>Elliott, G., Kao, S., & Grant, A. M. (2004). Mattering: Empirical Validation of a Social-Psychological Concept. *Self and Identity*, 3(4), 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576500444000119>

## The Give-and-Take Nature of Mattering

Mattering is reciprocal, which means it relies on give-and-take relationships (*Figure 2*). Mattering includes not just the views we hold about ourselves, but also other people's views of us. When we feel like we matter, we believe that we are adding value to something bigger and at the same time feel valued by others. Sometimes, when we add value, we are in direct contact with other people. However, there are also ways to matter, even without interacting with others. For example, taking care of a pet, cleaning up a park, or building a playground for others to use can increase our feelings of mattering. This is because we contribute to something that has the potential to positively impact the lives of others.

**Feeling Valued:** This is the side of mattering where we feel acknowledged and respected by others. It's when we know that our thoughts, feelings, and contributions are appreciated. We feel valued when our friends, family, colleagues, or anyone else who is significant in your life lets us know that we are appreciated.

*Figure 2: Mattering Model (adapted from Prilleltensky, 2020)*



**Adding Value:** It's about making a positive impact on others. For example, people can add value by helping a friend, volunteering in their community, or contributing to a project at work. When we help others succeed in a way that would be extremely challenging without our input demonstrates reliance and neededness. This is particularly the case, if we provide support over a longer period of time. For instance, a teacher who continues to take time helping a struggling student, can provide the appropriate scaffolding and instructions to help the student succeed and strive over time. A gardener who tends to an untamed garden, can see how flowers will grow and flourish in a way that would not have been possible without his or her care.



## Mattering and Belonging

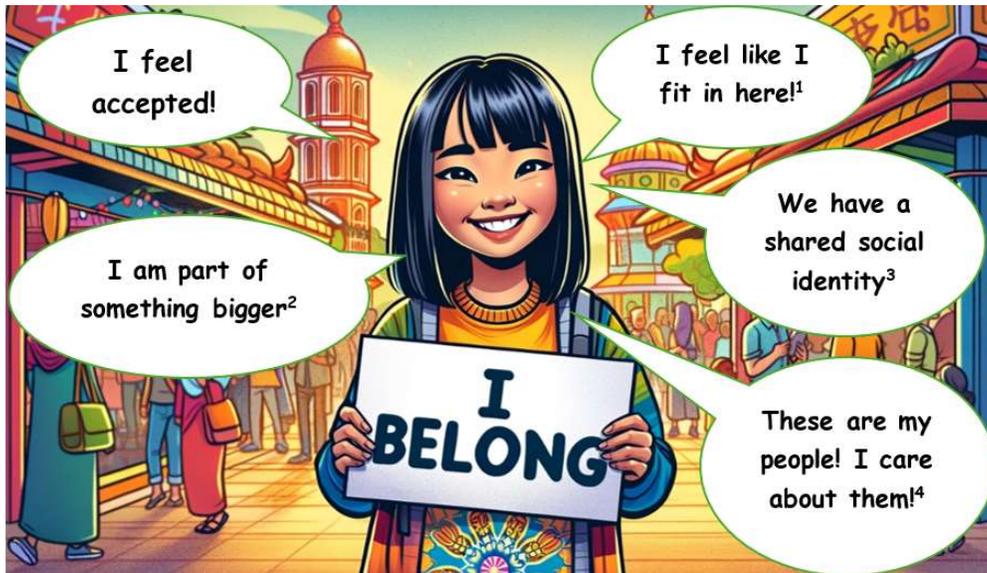
The two perspectives of feeling valued and adding value interact. When we matter to someone, we are more likely to feel that they matter to us. This fosters deeper connections, builds self-esteem, and creates a sense of belonging.<sup>1</sup>

It's also important to know the difference between belonging and mattering. Belonging means that we are part of a group, in which we share values and goals with other group members. However, we can belong to a group without feeling like we truly matter to that



group. Mattering goes a step further—it means that we are essential to others and have a meaningful impact on our group because others rely on us. Therefore, while it is important to feel like we belong, mattering is what enriches our connections, making them more fulfilling and emotionally rewarding.

Mattering extends beyond just fitting. It includes the crucial element of *reliance*, where others depend on our contributions. When other people rely on us, we may experience a sense of purpose or significance within a group. All in all, a sense of belonging is important for mattering. However, when we matter, our roles in a group are not just peripheral but pivotal, meaning that we are an active member who contributes to their group in a meaningful way. In this way, mattering enriches our social interactions and emotional well-being by combining the feeling of being part of something with the satisfaction of being important and essential.



Mattering is important because it touches on several aspects of human experience. It shields us from loneliness by connecting us with others.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, it boosts our self-esteem by affirming our value, and it strengthens our sense of belonging, anchoring us within our communities.



<sup>1</sup>Lambert, N. M., Stillman, T. F., Hicks, J. A., Kamble, S., Baumeister, R. F., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). To belong is to matter: Sense of belonging enhances meaning in life. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 39(11), 1418-1427.

<sup>2</sup>Aron, A., McLaughlin-Volpe, T., Mashek, D., Lewandowski, G., Wright, S. C., & Aron, E. N. (2004). Including others in the self. *European review of social psychology*, 15(1), 101-132.

<sup>3</sup>Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & Haslam, C. (2009). Social identity, health and well-being: An emerging agenda for applied psychology. *Applied Psychology-an International Review-Psychologie Appliquée-Revue Internationale*, 58(1), 1-23.

<sup>4</sup>Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>

<sup>5</sup>Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

<sup>6</sup>France, M.K., & Finney, S.J. (2009). What matters in the measurement of mattering? A construct validity study. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 42(2), 104-120

<sup>7</sup> See <sup>5</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Flett, G. L., & Zangeneh, M. (2020). Mattering as a vital support for people during the COVID-19 pandemic: The benefits of feeling and knowing that someone cares during times of crisis. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*, 2(1).

## Section 2 - The Significance of Mattering

Mattering is important at every point in our lives. It affects our mental health, personal relationships, and societal roles and is a protective barrier against loneliness and mental health difficulties.<sup>1</sup> When we know we matter to others, we are much less likely to feel lonely or isolated, irrespective how many or few social connections we might have. This sense of being valued helps us engage more in our community. For instance, feeling appreciated at work can lead us to take on more responsibilities, assist colleagues, and create deeper connections with coworkers<sup>1</sup>. These actions strengthen our sense of belonging and mattering which ultimately have a positive impact on our mental health. Research consistently shows that individuals who believe they matter are less prone to depression and anxiety, underscoring the essential role of mattering in people's abilities to cope with emotional difficulties.<sup>2,3</sup>

Mattering also elevates our self-esteem, by affirming our worth and the positive influence we have on others. This validation is fundamental to our self-confidence and motivation, encouraging us to follow our interests and ambitions, which helps us to engage with life on a deeper level.

Additionally, mattering enhances our ties to the community. Contributing to our community in a meaningful way makes us feel like we are a vital part of it, which further reinforces future community participation. *Figure 3* highlights this positive feedback loop of mattering. By fostering a sense of importance and belonging, mattering can help reduce the risk of mental health difficulties. It motivates us to engage with our environment, pushing us to pursue meaningful goals and build stronger relationships. This positive feedback loop, fueled by the reinforcement of mattering, can inspire us to overcome challenges and help us achieve personal growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

<sup>2</sup> Flett, G. L. (2018). *The psychology of mattering : Understanding the human need to be significant* / Gordon L. Flett. London, United Kingdom: Academic Press.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, M., & McCullough, B.C. (1981). Mattering: inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in community & mental health*

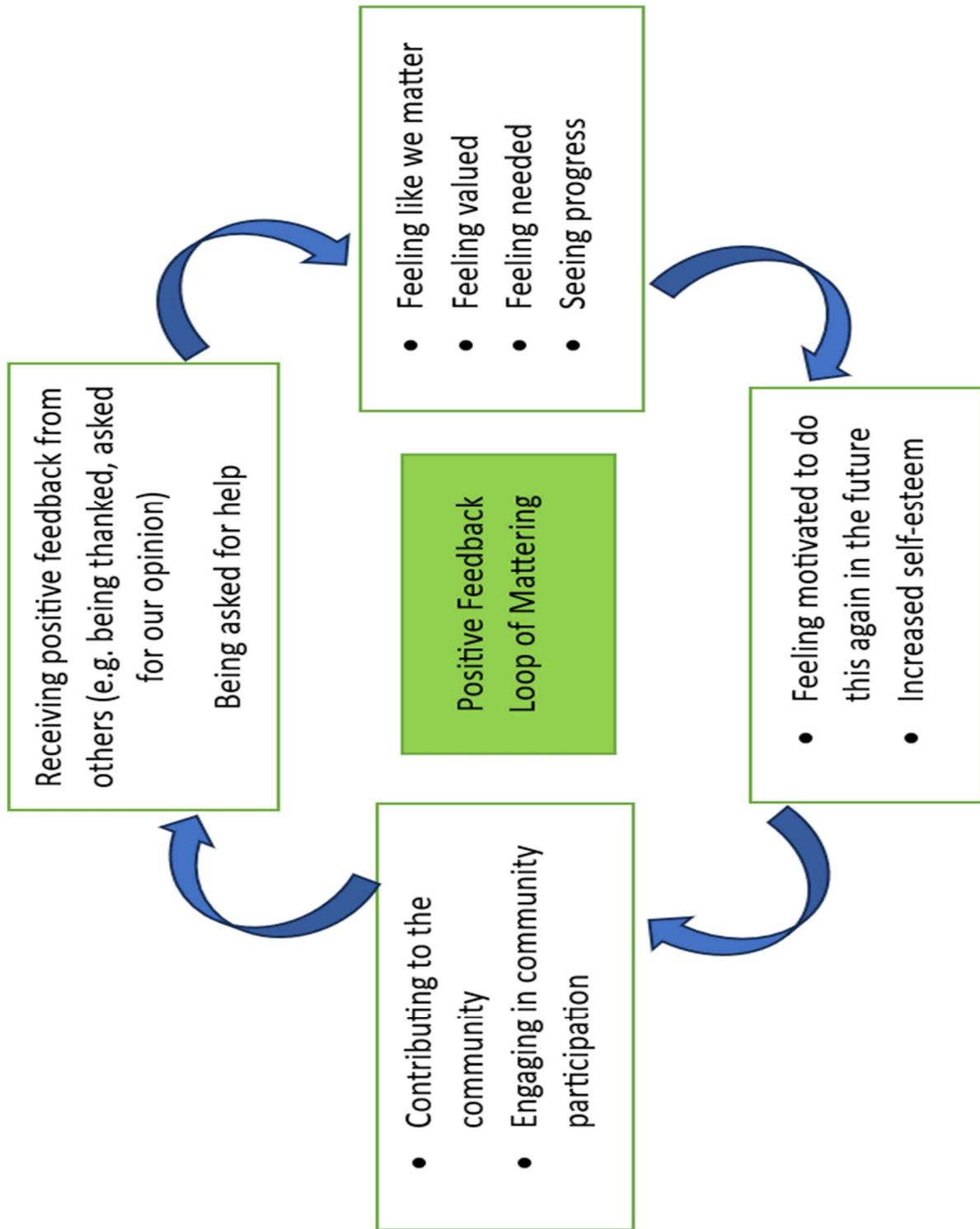


Figure 3: Positive feedback loop of mattering

## Section 3 - The Role of Mattering Across Life Stages

As we navigate different phases of life, the importance of mattering takes on new dimensions. For young people, it can be a critical factor in developing a healthy sense of identity and foster positive development. In adulthood, many people strive to find meaning and purpose in their life. This can take many forms such as exploring their personal or professional interests by learning new skills or furthering their knowledge in their areas of interests. Additionally, adults seek to find a place in their community and explore their roles in personal relationships. For older adults, mattering can promote a sense of purpose and counteract feelings of insignificance, particularly as with increasing age one's responsibilities and physical abilities change.

Each stage presents unique challenges and opportunities, but the underlying theme remains constant: the need to feel valued and to make a meaningful contribution. Recognizing and nurturing mattering can therefore play a pivotal role in addressing various life challenges, from mental health issues to social integration. This section explores how mattering influences various age groups and its importance in developmental and transitional periods.



## Youth and Adolescence

For young people mattering helps build self-esteem and a sense of identity. When youth feel valued by family, friends, and educators, they're more likely to exhibit positive behaviors and less likely to engage in risky behaviors.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Mattering can act as a buffer against the challenges of adolescence, reducing the risks of depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.<sup>4</sup> Schools and communities that foster a sense of mattering can contribute to healthier, happier adolescents who are equipped to reach their potential.



## Young Adults

As individuals transition into adulthood and possibly higher education, the significance of mattering shifts towards academic achievement, career choices, and personal relationships. College students who feel like they matter to their peers and professors are less prone to depression and more

likely to succeed academically<sup>5</sup>. For young adults, moving away from formal education and transitioning to employment, mattering in the workplace can enhance job satisfaction, productivity, and a sense of professional belonging, laying a strong foundation for their career trajectory and overall life satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Dixon, A. L., Scheidegger, C., & McWhirter, J. J. (2009). The adolescent mattering experience: Gender variations in perceived mattering, anxiety, and depression. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 87*(3), 302-310.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, S. (2004). Relative Contributions of Perceived Mattering to Parents and Friends in Predicting Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 99*(2), 591-601.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, M., & McCullough, B.C. (1981). Mattering: inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in community & mental health*

<sup>4</sup> Elliott, G. C., Colangelo, M. F., & Gelles, R. J. (2005). Mattering and suicide ideation: Establishing and elaborating a relationship. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 68*(3), 223-238.

<sup>5</sup> Flett, G. L., & Nepon, T. (2020). Mattering versus self-esteem in university students: Associations with regulatory focus, social feedback, and psychological distress. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 38*(6), 663-674.

## Middle-aged Adults

During middle age, mattering continues to play a vital role, particularly in the context of work-life balance, parenting, and social engagement. Feeling valued in their careers and personal lives helps middle-aged adults navigate the complexities of this stage, including caregiving for aging parents or supporting children. Mattering can mitigate feelings of midlife crisis by reinforcing their value and contributions to their family and society.<sup>1</sup>



## Older Adults



For older adults, mattering can combat feelings of isolation and redundancy that may come with changes in life roles and physical abilities. Engagement in community activities, mentorship roles, and family life helps maintain their sense of purpose and contribution. Recognizing and valuing the wisdom, experience, and involvement of older adults can enhance their well-being and encourage a continued sense of belonging and significance within their communities.<sup>2</sup>

## The Lifelong Importance of

## Mattering

Across all life stages, mattering serves as a key component of emotional well-being, social integration, and personal fulfillment. It influences our choices, behaviors, and perceptions of self-worth and belonging. As we age, the sources and expressions of mattering might change, but its fundamental value remains constant. Recognizing this, society, families, and individuals can take active steps to ensure that people feel they matter, from childhood through old age, fostering healthier communities and enriching personal lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Milner, A., Page, K. M., & LaMontagne, A. D. (2016). Perception of mattering and suicide ideation in the Australian working population: evidence from a cross-sectional survey. *Community mental health journal*, 52, 615-621.

<sup>2</sup> Myers, J. E., & Degges-White, S. (2007). Aging well in an upscale retirement community: The relationships among perceived stress, mattering, and wellness. *Adulthood Journal*, 6(2), 96-110.

## Section 4 - The Positive Aspects of Mattering

The benefits of mattering can impact several parts of our lives, such as enhancing our psychological resilience, enriching our social connections, and reinforcing our community participation. As discussed earlier, mattering brings also about a profound impact on motivation, well-being, and the ability to overcome challenges.

### 1) **Enriching Personal Growth**

Mattering fosters an environment where personal growth is not only encouraged but flourishes. It nurtures our psychological well-being by making us feel valued and respected, which in turn, bolsters our self-confidence and self-esteem<sup>1</sup>. This foundation allows us to pursue personal goals and challenges with a greater sense of purpose and determination. The knowledge that we matter to others can transform our approach to life, pushing us to strive for excellence and to continuously develop ourselves.

### 2) **Strengthening Social Connections**

At the heart of mattering is the enhancement of our social relationships. By engaging with our community and the people around us, bonds with family, friends, and colleagues can be strengthened by fostering mutual respect and appreciation. When we feel that we matter to others, we're more likely to invest time and effort into maintaining these relationships, leading to deeper and more fulfilling social connections. These strong social ties contribute to our emotional support system, which are crucial for navigating the ups and downs of life.

### 3) **Contributing to Community Well-being**



Mattering extends its benefits beyond the personal into the broader community. When individuals feel that they matter within their communities, they're more inclined to participate actively and contribute to communal well-being. This sense of responsibility can lead to increased volunteerism, civic engagement, and support for local initiatives. Communities that recognize and celebrate the contributions of their members foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose, creating a positive feedback loop that benefits all involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

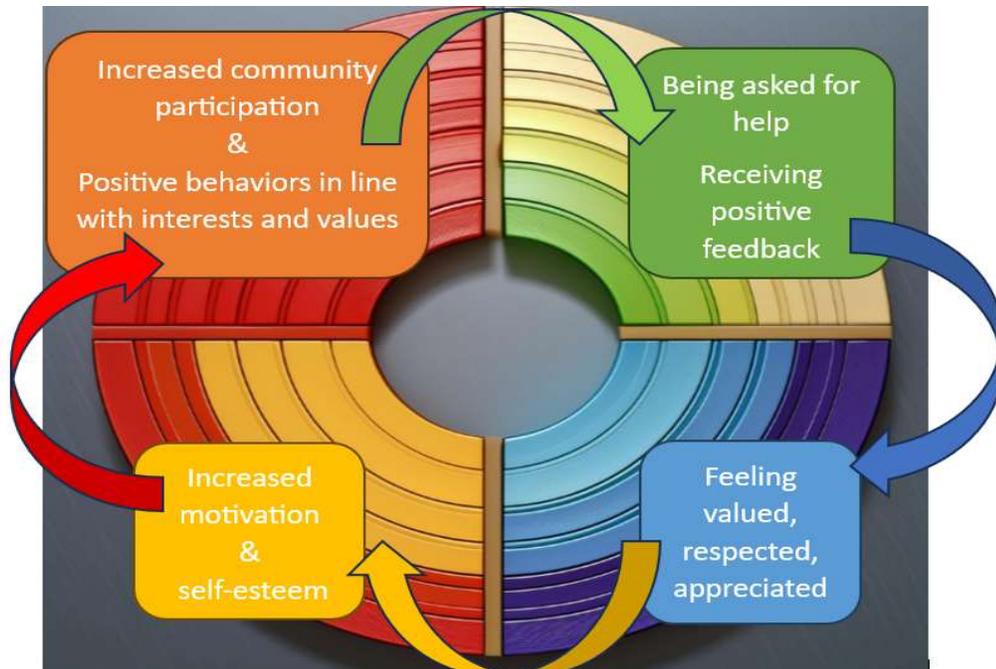
#### 4) **Fostering Resilience and Coping**

Mattering can also help up build resilience, which is our ability to cope with life's difficulties. Knowing that we play an essential role in the lives of others and our communities can help us face adversity. Knowing that we matter and being able to reflect on previous achievements, provides a sense of stability and support that can help us navigate through tough times, whether they be personal crises, professional challenges, or broader societal issues. The reassurance that we are valued and needed by remembering positive past experiences can give us the courage to overcome obstacles, which subsequently further increases our self-esteem.



#### 5) **Motivating Positive Life Changes**

Mattering acts as a reinforcer for positive life changes. It encourages us to engage in behaviors and activities that pursue paths that lead to a more fulfilling life. Whether it's making a career change, improving personal relationships, or engaging in altruistic activities, the drive to matter and make a difference can lead to significant transformations in how we live and interact with the world around us.

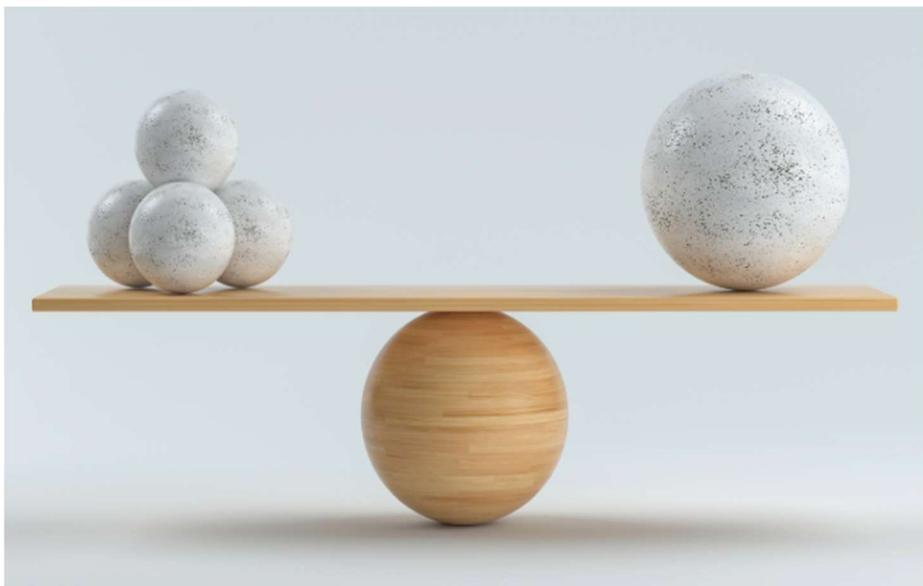


The positive aspects of mattering are far-reaching, influencing not only our self-perception and interpersonal relationships but also our engagement with the wider community. By understanding and leveraging the power of mattering, we can create a more supportive, resilient, and connected society.

## Section 5 - The Balance of Mattering

After we've now discussed the benefits of mattering, it's important to also recognize the need for a balance. Mattering immensely contributes to our self-esteem, social connections, and community engagement, but it also requires mindful management to prevent it from becoming a source of stress or burden.

The desire to be significant in the eyes of others can sometimes lead us to face high expectations, either from ourselves or those around us. This pressure to continually prove our worth or to always be there for others can become overwhelming. It's vital to remember that mattering doesn't mean we must be available at all times or to everyone. Finding a middle ground between the value of mattering and setting realistic expectations and boundaries is key to maintaining our emotional health.



While mattering can be a source of validation and self-esteem, it's important to cultivate a sense of self-worth that is independent of external affirmation. Embracing one's value regardless of recognition ensures resilience in times when external validation may be scarce<sup>1</sup>. One way to facilitate this is to pursue leisure activities or personal goals that contribute to one's sense of identity and fulfillment. Cultivating relationships where both parties feel they matter to each other can prevent feelings of one-sided obligation and enhance the joy and fulfillment derived from these connections. Encouraging open communication about needs and boundaries within these relationships can further ensure that mattering remains a source of positive engagement.

Overextending ourselves when aiming to contribute to the lives of others can be rewarding, but it can also lead to burnout.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing our limits and saying no when necessary is not selfish but a necessary step to ensure we can continue to make a meaningful impact in a sustainable manner.<sup>2</sup> Acknowledging that we cannot be everything to everyone at all times helps preserve our mental well-being and ensures that our contributions remain a source of joy rather than becoming a burden.



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<sup>1</sup> Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

<sup>2</sup>Ybema, J. F., Kuijer, R. G., Hagedoorn, M., & Buunk, B. P. (2002). Caregiver burnout among intimate partners of patients with a severe illness: An equity perspective. *Personal Relationships*, 9(1), 73-88.

Some caregivers may experience the phenomenon of mattering too much, as they matter to the extent of overextending themselves, especially as the care is often not reciprocated. Caregivers invest considerable time, energy, and emotion, motivated by a strong sense of duty and the desire to care for another person. This dedication can lead to neglecting their own needs, causing burnout and stress<sup>1, 2</sup>. The absence of reciprocity, though not the other person's fault, may make caregivers feel isolated and question their worth outside their caregiving role. This highlights the risk of mattering too much, tilting the balance away from mutual benefit to a one-sided exertion that can compromise the caregiver's well-being.

If you are a caregiver feeling the weight of your role, it's important to not only look after the other person but also after yourself. Acknowledging the complex mix of emotions that accompany caregiving is crucial; it's okay to feel overwhelmed. Seeking out support, whether through friends, family, or caregiver support groups, can offer much-needed relief as you may experience that you are not



alone. Importantly, setting boundaries and practicing self-care are not selfish acts but necessary steps to maintain your well-being. Remember that your worth extends beyond your caregiving duties; you matter as an individual with your own needs and dreams. Balancing care for others with care for yourself is key to sustaining your own health and ensuring the best care for your loved one.

Balancing the need to matter with personal well-being can at times be challenging. By managing the pressures and expectations associated with mattering, individuals can enjoy the profound benefits it brings without succumbing to potential drawbacks. This balance allows for a more sustainable and enriching experience of mattering, both for oneself and in the lives of others.

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<sup>1</sup> Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368

<sup>2</sup>Gérain, P., & Zech, E. (2019). Informal caregiver burnout? Development of a theoretical framework to understand the impact of caregiving. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 466359.

## Section 6 - Mattering Toolkit

Now it's time to put everything we've learned into practice. There are multiple things we can do to foster our sense of mattering. Below we provide a toolkit with tips on how to increase mattering in yourself, other people and how to foster a community where everyone matters.

### Strategies for enhancing mattering at an individual level

To increase our own sense of mattering, we can engage in several self-reflective activities that reinforce their value and importance within our social circles and communities.

Here are some practical steps to enhance our own sense of mattering:

1. **Engage in Self-Reflection and Kindness towards yourself:** Take time to reflect on your strengths, values, and contributions. Recognizing your unique qualities and how they impact others can boost your sense of self-worth.
2. **Set Personal Goals:** Setting and achieving personal goals, especially those that benefit others, can reinforce your sense of purpose and mattering.
3. **Volunteer:** Offering your time and skills to causes you care about can make you feel valued and part of something bigger than yourself.
4. **Initiate Conversations:** Reach out to others, whether they are friends, family, or colleagues. Showing interest in their lives can help you become a valued part of their social network.
5. **Ask for Feedback:** Solicit feedback on your contributions in various aspects of your life, such as work, family, or community projects. Hearing how you've made a difference can enhance your sense of mattering, while negative feedback show you areas of improvement and help you learn for next time.
6. **Join Groups or Clubs:** Becoming part of a group that shares your interests (e.g. book clubs or walking groups) can provide a sense of belonging and mattering.
7. **Be a Mentor:** If you are in a position to share your knowledge and experience with someone who is struggling and could benefit from your guidance, you'll can experience how to feel relied upon which can boost your sense of mattering.
8. **Practice Gratitude:** Cultivate gratitude for the roles others play in your life. Expressing gratitude can increase mutual feelings of mattering.
9. **Practice self-care:** Engaging in self-care and pursuing personal interests reminds you that you matter to yourself as much as to others. You can also take time to celebrate your wins, no matter how big or small, by treating yourself to a nice meal or a picnic in the sun.

## Strategies to boosting mattering in other people

1. **Acknowledge and Validate Others:** Regularly recognize and appreciate the contributions and presence of people in your life. Simple acknowledgments can make others feel valued and important.
2. **Be Present and Listen Actively:** Show genuine interest in the lives of others by listening actively and being fully present in your interactions. This conveys that their thoughts and feelings matter to you.
3. **Express Gratitude:** Make it a habit to express gratitude to those around you. Thanking someone for their help, time, or simply for being part of your life reinforces their sense of significance.
4. **Offer Support and Assistance:** Offer your help to friends, family, and colleagues. Helping others not only makes them feel valued but also reinforces your own sense of purpose, reliance and mattering. Encourage and empower the people in your life to pursue their goals and interests.
5. **Seek and Value Others' Opinions:** Involve others in decision-making processes or seek their advice on matters. Valuing someone's opinion shows that you consider them important and makes them feel needed.
6. **Build and Maintain Strong Relationships:** Invest time and effort into building and maintaining strong, healthy relationships. Deep, meaningful connections can make you and the people in your life feel more valued. For instance, you can volunteer or engage in community events. Using your skills and talents to contribute to the well-being of others can help foster strong relationships and mutual feelings of mattering.
7. **Promote a Culture of Mattering:** Foster an environment, whether at work or at home, where everyone's contributions are recognized and celebrated. Creating a culture that values each individual's input can amplify a collective sense of mattering.



## Creating Communities of Mattering

To foster mattering at the community level, we need to create environments where individuals feel valued, recognized, and connected. In many settings, we experience *Me Cultures*, which are driven by individualistic values. *We Cultures* support collective values and emphasize the importance that everyone has the “right and responsibility to feel valued and add value”.<sup>1</sup> Generally, *We Cultures* aim to balance personal-, relational- and communal well-being.<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve this, personal liberties may be limited to foster equality. Community leaders can help create *We Cultures* where everyone matters by creating opportunities for individuals. Community members can use their talents and skills for communal benefit. Here are some approaches to foster communities where everyone matters:

*Strategies for community leaders to create communities where everyone matters.*

1. **Publicly recognize individuals’ contributions:**

Praise community members in public and offer criticism in private. Recognize members’ contribution whether through volunteering, civic engagement, or other forms of participation. Public acknowledgments, and appreciation events can make members feel seen and valued.



2. **Shared Decision-Making:** Involve community members in decision-making processes, especially on issues that affect them. This inclusion reinforces their sense of importance and encourages active participation in community development.

3. **Organize Social Connection Initiatives:** Organize community events, workshops, and social gatherings that encourage interaction and relationship-building among community members. These initiatives can help individuals form meaningful connections and foster a sense of belonging and mattering to their community.

4. **Offer Development Opportunities:** Offer community members (e.g. employees, volunteers, parishioners, neighbors) opportunities for growth, learning, and advancement. Investing in personal or skill development of community members shows that the organization values their contributions and cares about their progression.

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<sup>1</sup>Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and politics. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65(1-2), 16-34.

<sup>2</sup>Dorling, D. (2017). *The equality effect: Improving life for everyone*. Oxford, UK: New Internationalist.

*Strategies for community members to create communities where everyone matters.*

1. **Participate in Peer Recognition:** Recognize team members or peers for their hard work, achievements, and contributions. Personalized acknowledgments, awards, and public praise can boost morale and a sense of mattering.
2. **Create Inclusive Environments:** Create a culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ensuring all community members (e.g. in the workplace, neighborhood, church or other organization) feel respected and valued regardless of their background. Offer support and ask for the opinions of your community members. When planning get-togethers be mindful that members of underprivileged and marginalized groups may not have the same resources. Therefore, educate yourself about no-cost or low-cost team-building opportunities
3. **Be proactive:** Participate in opportunities offered by the organization or approach community leaders and offer ideas to increase community engagement. Engage in campaigns to raise awareness about social inequalities and advocate for policies that promote equity and inclusion. Mobilizing community action on these issues can enhance the collective sense of purpose and mattering.
4. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Form partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and government agencies to tackle social inequalities. Collaborative efforts can leverage resources, expertise, and influence to make meaningful changes and ensure everyone in the community feels they matter.



## Conclusion

In exploring the complex concept of mattering, we've discussed its definition, significance, and the profound impact it has across the lifespan and within communities. Mattering is about feeling valued and adding value, creating a reciprocal bond that enhances our sense of belonging, self-worth, and purpose. We hope that the strategies and approaches outlined here offer practical ways to cultivate mattering at both individual and community levels.

We've highlighted not only the importance of mattering but also the benefits it brings to mental health, social relationships, and community cohesion. By fostering environments where everyone matters—through recognition, support, and empowerment—we can build stronger, more resilient communities that are inclusive and appreciative of each member's unique contributions.

Mattering is a fundamental human need. It's about seeing and being seen, valuing and being valued, contributing, and recognizing contributions. This document invites you to reflect on how you can increase your own sense of mattering and, just as importantly, how we can make others feel like they truly matter. Whether through small daily acts of kindness and acknowledgment or through broader initiatives to enhance community well-being, each effort counts. We all have the ability to contribute in one way or another to communities where everyone matters.

