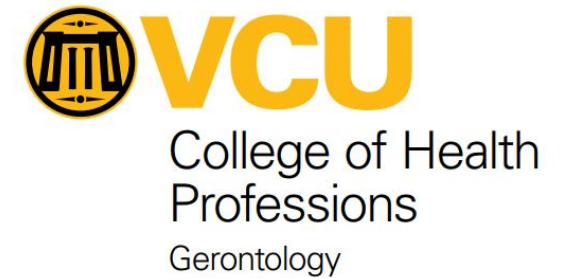




# Social Connectedness, Health, and Wellbeing

Gigi Amateau, MS



# Objectives

**1.**

**Examine** social connectedness as a multi-level idea.

**2.**

**Reflect** on positive social connectedness as part of a trauma-informed toolkit.

**3.**

**Learn** how social connectedness impacts health and well-being.

**4.**

**Explore** our individual social networks.

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”

(Preamble to the Constitution of World Health Organization, 1948)

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and **social** well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”

(Preamble to the Constitution of World Health Organization, 1948)

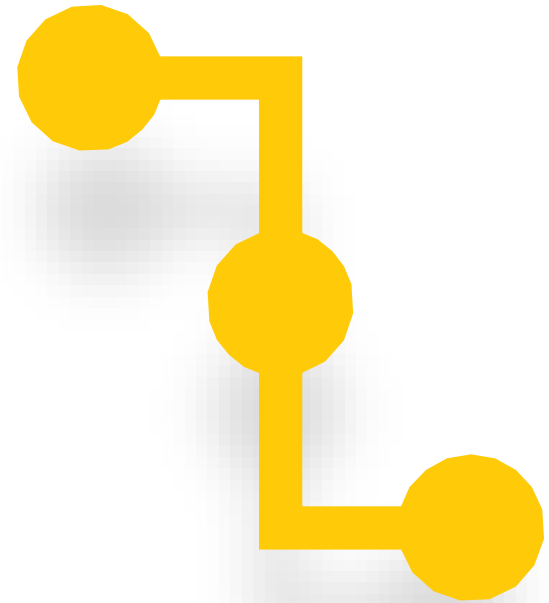
# Why is Connectedness Important?

- **PREVALENCE** - 25% of American adults claim that they have no one with whom to share a personal problem (AARP Foundation, 2018).

43% of elders have reported being lonely (Perissinotto, Stijacic Cenzer, & Covinsky, 2012).

**HEALTH BENEFITS & CONSEQUENCES** - From immunity to inflammation, cognitive impairment to stroke, our social connections play a role in disease: risk and preventive.

**LONGEVITY** - People with strong social connections live longer. And without strong relationships, life expectancy shrinks.



# Significance for our community-based work



## **OLDER AMERICANS ACT**

2020 reauthorization emphasizes screening, assessment, education, and intervention at the federal, state, and local levels related to social isolation and loneliness



## **SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH**

Momentum to create specific diagnosis, treatment, and thus, reimbursement for SDoH.



## **ECONOMIC IMPACT**

Socially isolated hospital patients or those at high risk experience delayed hospital discharge (Landeiro, Leal, & Gray, 2015).



**SOCIAL  
ISOLATION  
AND HEALTH  
CARE  
UTILIZATION**

**PHYSICIAN VISITS**

- More likely to seek medical attention for social interaction.

**HOSPITAL LENGTH OF STAY**

- Smaller social networks associated with longer hospital stays.

**HOSPITAL READMISSIONS**

- Weaker social relations linked to increased rates of hospital readmission.

**DELAYED HOSPITAL DISCHARGE**

- Average cost of stay of patient with delayed discharge: 77.5% higher

**POORER MEDICAL SELF-MANAGEMENT**

- Lower adherence to medication management, follow-up care, prevention-screening.

# Social Connection



## **STRUCTURAL**

MARITAL STATUS  
SOCIAL NETWORKS  
SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
LIVING ALONE  
SOCIAL ISOLATION



## **FUNCTIONAL**

RECEIVED SUPPORT  
PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT  
PERCEIVED LONELINESS



## **QUALITY**

MARITAL QUALITY  
RELATIONSHIP STRAIN  
SOCIAL INCLUSION OR  
EXCLUSION



# The Connectedness Continuum

(Amateau, G., Hickey, P., Gendron, T., Link, S., MacDonald, C., Watson, T., Welleford, E.A.)



## Definition of social isolation:

A state in which the individual experiences less social engagement with others than they would like, and they report that this interferes with their quality of life. *(based on Nicholson)*

## Definition of social connectedness:

A state in which the individual experiences a satisfying number of social gatherings, close relationships and/or satisfaction with social contacts and reports that these experiences maintain their quality of life. *(based on Toepoel)*

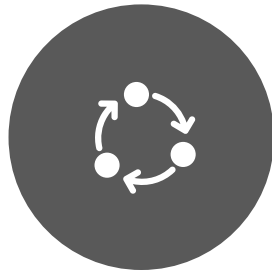
# Who is at risk for loneliness or social isolation?

1. Family Caregivers
2. LGBTQ Older Adults
3. Minority Older Adults
4. Trauma Survivors
5. Life Stages:
  - late 20s
  - mid50s
  - late 80s

# ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIETAL RISK FACTORS



**1. LACK OF  
TRANSPORTATION**



**2. BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT**



**3. POVERTY**



**4. NEIGHBORHOOD  
ISOLATION**

# INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS

1

**Loss**

*(of spouse, job,  
home)*

2

**Less than high  
school  
education**

3

**Living Alone**

4

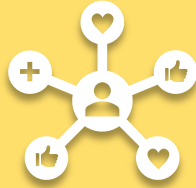
**Recent trauma  
or transition**

# TRANSITIONS

# SCENARIO: Ada Johnson

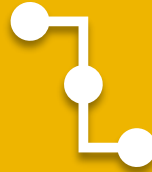
Two years ago, Ada Johnson's family members strongly influenced her to leave the independent living community where she had lived for 15 years since losing her husband. Mrs. Johnson sold all her belongings and moved in with her great niece. The two women found it difficult to live together amicably. One year ago, Mrs. Johnson moved again, this time to a large senior community where she rents a small studio apartment. At her former place, she was also the receptionist, where she loved being at the heart of the community. Mrs. Johnson receives 46 hours of personal assistance per week from two different personal care aides. Her niece calls to check in every week, Mrs. Johnson can count on that. She regularly worships on Sundays with a congregation where she has been a member for 35 years. Most weeks, a sister from the congregation comes on Wednesday for Bible study and brother drives her to and from Sunday services. When a new care aide starts working with her, Mrs. Johnson shares "I had not expected to be starting over with nothing and no one. At 98? No, ma'am." The care aide asks if it has been difficult to make new friends. Mrs. Johnson replies, "I don't have many friends here. You know, the hardest part about being this old is that I'm so lonely. I want to belong. I don't want people to quit on me." The care aide shares the conversation with her supervisor who responds, "But, you know what? Mrs. Johnson has more support than most of our other clients."

# Review: Attributes of Social Connection



## **STRUCTURAL**

MARITAL STATUS  
SOCIAL NETWORKS  
SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
LIVING ALONE  
SOCIAL ISOLATION



## **FUNCTIONAL**

RECEIVED SUPPORT  
PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT  
PERCEIVED LONELINESS

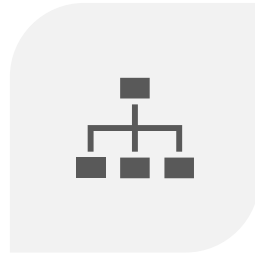


## **QUALITY**

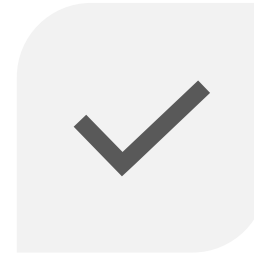
MARITAL QUALITY  
RELATIONSHIP STRAIN  
SOCIAL INCLUSION OR  
EXCLUSION

Think about the 3 attributes of social connectedness: structural, functional, and quality.

With which of these are you most concerned for Mrs. Johnson?



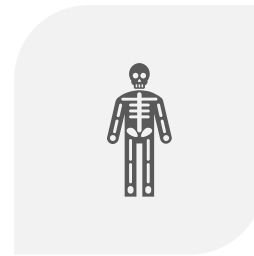
A. STRUCTURAL



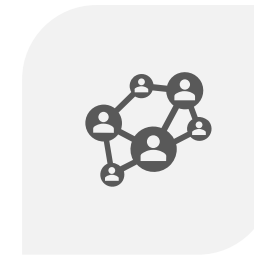
B. FUNCTIONAL



C. QUALITY



D. ALL



E. NONE. MRS. JOHNSON HAS STRONG SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.



# FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

Physically Fit

Emotionally  
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With  
Meaning

# FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

Physically Fit

Emotionally  
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With  
Meaning

# Physical Health and Connectedness

---

## **1. Immune system**

Loneliness increases inflammation AND suppresses immunity (Cole, 2015).

---

## **2. Chronic disease**

Strong social bonds are as good for you as quitting smoking. Weak social circle carries a health risk equal to smoking 15 cigarettes daily (Holt-Lunstad).

---

## **3. Built Environment**

Living in neighborhoods with low social cohesion and in fear of crime accelerates cellular aging (Blackburn & Epel, 2017).



## VAGUS NERVE, THE WANDERER

- . Deep breathing
- . Singing
- . Laughing
- . Exposure to cold
- . Positive social connections



## VAGUS NERVE, THE WANDERER

- . Deep breathing
- . Singing
- . Laughing
- . Exposure to cold
- . **Positive social connections**

# Physical Health and Social Connectedness Map



**My environment**  
*(sidewalks, ramps, parks,  
market, river)*

**My resources**  
*(organizations, clubs, apps)*

**My healthcare providers**  
*(doctor, dentist, trainer,  
therapist)*

**My personal supports**  
*(family, friends, companions,  
mentors)*

# FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

Physically Fit

Emotionally  
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With  
Meaning

# Emotional Soundness and Connectedness

1

## **Happiness**

70% of our happiness comes from relationships (Murray & Peacock, 1996).

2

## **Self-esteem**

Positive relationships help us thrive emotionally, increase our self-esteem and self-acceptance (Pinker, 2016).

3

## **Affinity**

Singing in groups has been shown to improve happiness and well-being and to spark rapid social bonding (Pearce, Luanay, & Dunbar).



“Good **relationships** keep us healthier and happier. Period.”

*Robert Waldinger, Harvard University*



REFLECT:  
MOST POSITIVE  
CONNECTIONS  
IN YOUR LIFE

# Soul Friends: 6 Mechanisms of Transformation

## 1. Containment

- A safe holding environment within which you relax and expand.

## 2. Twinship

- Inspires deep feelings of belonging and a sense of alikeness.

## 3. Noble Adversary

- Challenging or confrontational to your benefit.

## 4. Mirroring

- Sees something special in you, reflects you back to you.

## 5. Mystic resonance

- A mysterious, mystic kinship.

## 6. Conscious partnership

- Irreplaceable companion in your struggle to make meaning and express yourself.

# FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

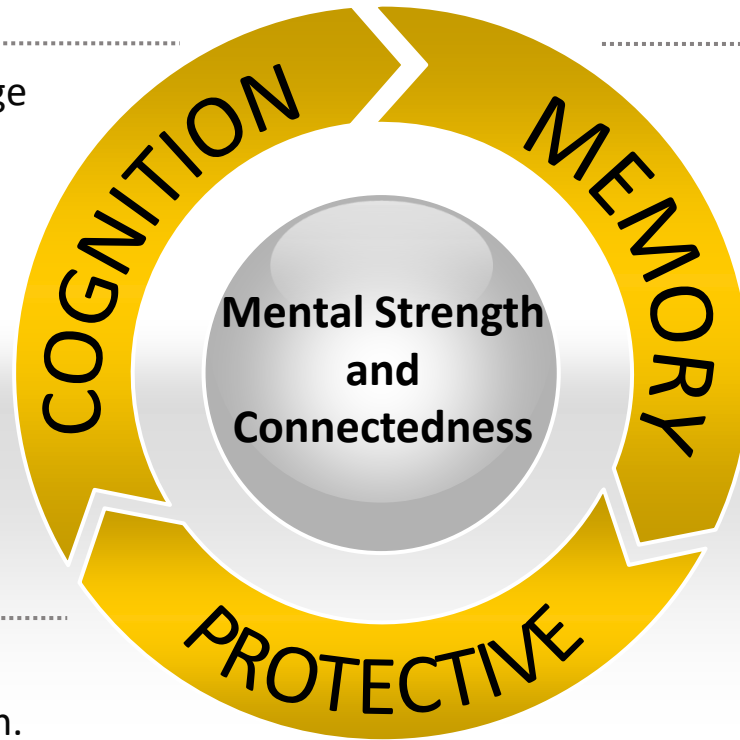
Physically Fit

Emotionally  
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With  
Meaning

Isolation and loneliness change the brain (Wilson, Cacioppo).



More frequent social activity is associated with reduced risk of cognitive impairment. Higher social integration is associated with less cognitive decline and slower memory loss (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

Across the lifespan, good relationships protect the brain.

# FOUR PILLARS OF OPTIMAL BEING

(HOLLY NIEMELA)

Physically Fit

Emotionally  
Sound

Mentally Strong

Living With  
Meaning

**Meaning, Purpose, and  
Connectedness**

**1. Ask for Help.** Asking for help contributes to the happiness of the person we ask because they feel connected and needed (Seppala).

**2. Volunteering, Lifelong Learning, Spirituality.**

Community ties = richer lives (Ertel).

**3. Belonging.** A sense of belonging is an important driver of meaning. Being excluded causes pain and conflict (Smith).

# SD-WISE: Attributes of Wisdom

wisdom

social  
advising

emotional  
regulation

pro-social  
behavior

insight

tolerance  
for  
divergent  
values

decisiveness



# SD-WISE: Attributes of Wisdom

wisdom

**social  
advising**

emotional  
regulation

**pro-social  
behavior**

insight

**tolerance  
for  
divergent  
values**

decisiveness



## **ACCESS**

From picking up prescriptions to transporting to appointments

## **ENCOURAGEMENT**

Positive reinforcement when we need it and when we don't.

## **BUFFERING**

Protection and relief from stress.

## **PEER HEALTH BEHAVIORS**

Healthy social patterns: food, activity, self-care.

## **ADVOCACY**

Intervening, navigating, and representing our best interests

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Positive peer pressure to follow up, comply, monitor

## **PERSONALIZED INFORMATION**

Customized ideas, connections, resources about our lives and situations, on-demand.

**HOW  
POSITIVE SOCIAL  
SUPPORTS WORK  
TO IMPROVE OUR  
HEALTH**

# EASE

(Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008)



## Extend yourself

Send out small social signals. Take tiny steps in small doses of positive sensations that originate with social interactions.



## Action plan

Acknowledge it's difficult and why. Be intentional and plan to seek out connections.



## Seek collectives

Connection is not about being interesting, but rather: **be interested.**

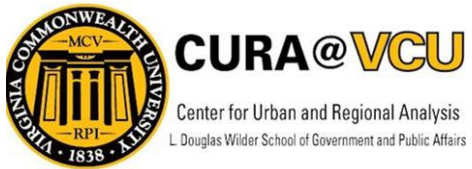


## Expect the best

Expect warmth and connection.



# THANK YOU



# References

- AARP Foundation. (2018). *Loneliness and social connection: A national survey of adults 45 and over*.
- Blackburn, E., & Epel, Elissa, author. (2017). *The telomere effect : A revolutionary approach to living younger, healthier, longer* (First ed.).
- Brenoff, A. (2015, June 04). Playgrounds for seniors improve fitness, reduce isolation. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/playgrounds-for-seniors\\_n\\_7452270.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/04/playgrounds-for-seniors_n_7452270.html)
- Burns, V., & Sussman, T. (2019). Homeless for the First Time in Later Life: Uncovering More Than One Pathway. *The Gerontologist*, 59(2), 251-259.
- Cacioppo, Stephanie, Capitano, John P., Cacioppo, John T., Hinshaw, Stephen P., & Albarracín, Dolores. (2014). Toward a neurology of loneliness. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1464-1504.
- Cacioppo, J., & Patrick, William. (2008). *Loneliness : human nature and the need for social connection* (1st ed.). New York: W.W. Norton.
- Cacioppo, J. (2008, December 12). Easing your way out of loneliness. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/connections/200812/easing-your-way-out-loneliness>
- Clifton, L., Young, Kevin, & Glaser, Michael S. (2015). *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (American Poets Continuum). New York: BOA Editions.
- Cigna U.S. *Loneliness Index*. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.cigna.com/assets/docs/newsroom/loneliness-survey-2018-full-report.pdf>
- Cole, S. W., Capitano, J. P., Chun, K., Arevalo, J. M., Ma, J., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2015). Myeloid differentiation architecture of leukocyte transcriptome dynamics in perceived social isolation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(49), 15142-15147. doi:10.1073/pnas.1514249112
- Cope, S. (2017). *Soul friends: The transforming power of deep human connection*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T. F., & Sbarra, D. A. (2017). Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *The American psychologist*, 72 (6), 517–530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103

# References

- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T., Layton, J., & Brayne, C. (2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review (Social Relationships and Mortality). *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), E1000316.
- Lee, E., Depp, C., Palmer, B., Glorioso, D., Daly, R., Liu, J., . . . Jeste, D. (2019). High prevalence and adverse health effects of loneliness in community-dwelling adults across the lifespan: Role of wisdom as a protective factor. 31(10), 1447-1462.
- Macdonald, C., Gendron, T., Hickey, P., Watson, T., & Amateau, G. (2016). Identifying risk of social isolation with online case management systems and data mapping. *The Gerontologist*, 56 (S3).
- Pearce, E., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. (2015). The ice-breaker effect: Singing mediates fast social bonding. *Royal Society Open Science*, 2(10), 150221.
- Perissinotto, C. M., Stijacic Cenzer, I., & Covinsky, K. E. (2012). Loneliness in older persons: a predictor of functional decline and death. *Archives of internal medicine*, 172(14), 1078–1083. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archinternmed.2012>.
- Pinker, S. (2014). *The village effect : How face-to-face contact can make us healthier, happier, and smarter* (First ed.).
- Preamble to the Constitution of WHO as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19 June - 22 July 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of WHO, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.
- Suen, I., Gendron, T., & Gough, M. (2018). Social isolation and the built environment: A call for research and advocacy. *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 27 (4), 131-135.
- Thomas, M., Bangen, K., Palmer, B., Sirkin Martin, A., Avanzino, J., Depp, C., . . . Jeste, D. (2019). A new scale for assessing wisdom based on common domains and a neurobiological model: The San Diego Wisdom Scale (SD-WISE). *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 108, 40-47.
- Waldinger, R. (2015, November). What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_waldinger\\_what\\_makes\\_a\\_good\\_life\\_lessons\\_from\\_the\\_longest\\_study\\_on\\_happiness](https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness)

# SUMMARY

- Think about social connectedness as made up of structure, function, and quality.
- Experiencing trauma, loss, and transitions increase our risk of impaired social connectedness.
- Positive personal relationships are protective and promote resilience, well-being, and growth.
- The extent of our positive connectedness impacts all dimensions of health and functioning.