



Support systems offer buffer in tough times

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Humans are social animals, yet society is becoming more and more isolated. Instead of having a good conversation, today, people all too often rely on text messages, emails or faxes to communicate.

Although very efficient, the use of such impersonal technology can make it difficult to recognize the emotions behind the message. Without the added information provided by the tone or volume of a voice, a facial expression or body language, the intent is often misconstrued and important social experiences can be lost all together.

Our dependence on others begins at conception. First, we are nourished and protected in our mother's womb. At birth, we become dependent on caretakers for our every need, both physically and emotionally.

As children, we rely on caretakers to provide the necessities of life, but also to teach us appropriate social interaction and to guide us through normal emotional and cognitive development.

As adolescents, peer groups offer further learning experiences while also ideally providing a group in which one feels a sense of belonging. Friendships are important in emotional growth and stability.

In this day and age of computers, cell phones and long work hours, it is easy to forget how important a healthy support system actually can be for an individual.

When people are depressed or anxious, they tend to isolate themselves from others. The physiological response to sadness is for both

metabolism and energy to decrease. Enthusiasm for life wanes.

This may well have been helpful and adaptive for Neanderthals, as it kept the clan close to home and safe. It may also be helpful in times of mourning. But, often, isolation can give rise to depression.

Support systems are meant to provide a buffer for stress, though surrounding oneself with unhealthy people can actually create more stress.

Sometimes, people have difficulty recognizing what is and is not healthy support.

The following are some areas that could be road blocks to developing a healthy support system if the individual does not identify and change these areas within himself:

- Difficulty reaching out to others
- Low self esteem
- A tendency to become too needy
- A lack of social skills to develop and/or maintain relationships
- Lack of trust
- Inability to reciprocate support

What are some characteristics of a supportive relationship? Here are a few:

- Supportive people are open-minded and validating. They let you describe how you feel and who you are.
- Supportive people recognize your strengths, acknowledge your individuality and are supportive of your goals.
- Supportive relationships boast mutual compassion.
- Supportive people are accepting

and non-judgmental.

- Supportive relationships engender good-natured humor and playfulness.
- Supportive people are emotionally there for you.

Think of the people in your life who have these characteristics and how much they mean to you. If you lack this kind of support, seek it out by working to develop these characteristics within yourself and by nurturing new friendships.

Join a club or support group. Attend to a class. Start a hobby.

Building supportive relationships can help with stress and provide validation that may be vital in times of need.

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