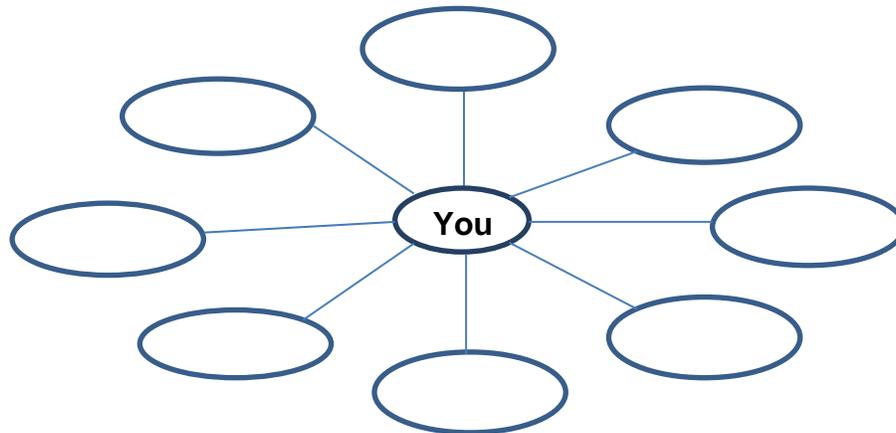


## Assessing My Support Network

Handout available for download on the [YRRP website](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/handouts.html) at:  
[www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/handouts.html](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/handouts.html)



### Size/Extent Considerations

How many supportive relationships do you have?

How many are within an hour of where you live?

How often do you spend time with someone other than those with whom you live?

### Quality Considerations

How satisfied are you with your relationship?

Do you have a variety of supports?

- Do you talk to friends or relatives on the phone, via e-mail, or through texting?
- Do you go to meetings, social clubs, or other group activities?
- Do you belong to online social networking sites or support groups for people with similar life situations?

What kind of support do you need from those in your network?

Does your network provide support for most of your needs?

# Tips for Building and Strengthening Your Personal Support Network

## Benefits of a Personal Support Network

- Increases self-esteem
- Helps with practical aspects of life (for example: child care, transportation)
- Improves mental and emotional well-being
- Reduces stress and stress-related illnesses
- Increases immunity (resistance to disease)
- Provides companionship
- Supplies emotional support

## Types of Personal Support Network

**Formal support networks** – those provided through agencies or organizations

**Informal support networks** – people who are there for you when you need them

In the majority of these relationships, do you feel that you are

- Heard/Understood
- Loved and/or appreciated
- Informed
- Useful
- Able to talk about your deepest problems
- Have a definite role or place in the relationship
- Able to be yourself

## Tips for Strengthening Your Relationships

- Stay positive
- Communicate openly
- Be supportive

## Tips for Expanding Your Personal Support Network

### **Get a Pet (unless caring for one would be a burden)**

- Pets (particularly dogs) can help you meet your neighbors and get to know people.
- Sometimes, people receive support from friends they met through their pet.
- Of course, if taking care of a pet is too taxing, burdensome, or expensive, this would not be a worthwhile strategy for building your personal support network.

### **Genuinely Work to Help Others (without trying to get something in return)**

- Be nice for the sake of being nice.
- People who work to help others actually receive more help in return, but only if

they are focused on the other person's needs and not their own goals.

### **Lean on Both Geographically Close Friends and Long-Distance Friends**

- Long-distance friends are helpful for providing emotional support.
- Friends who live close are helpful for providing concrete help and emotional support.

### **Rely on Friends who have Empathy for Others**

- Friends who can see your perspective and understand what you are feeling tend to be more effective helpers.
- Try to surround yourself with friends who have empathy for those around them.

### **Go for the Winning Combo: Seek to Develop New Friendships and Enrich Current Friendships**

- Just focusing on making new friends or just trying to improve your current friendships can be problematic.
- It is the combination of working to make new friends and nurturing your current friendships that helps reduce loneliness.

### **Remember that Quality Matters More than Quantity**

- The number of friends you have is not as important as the quality of friends you have.

### **Take Care of Your Physical and Emotional Health**

- When you are battling physical illness or depression, you are likely to have less support in your life.
- Exercise, go for walks, join a gym, and stay up-to-date on your wellness check-ups.
- Get healthy and stay healthy to put yourself in the best position to meet new people and develop new friendships.

### **Avoid Facebook Friends who Post Negative Responses**

- Individuals sometimes turn to social media outlets (such as Facebook) to make contact with supportive others.
- Friends who post negative responses to your comments on Facebook are not helpful for your emotional well-being.

### **Be Patient when Waiting for Friendships to Develop**

- New friendships do not always produce helpful support immediately; give your relationships time to develop.
- It can take six months to a year for people's ties to be close enough for support to become helpful.