



Building Community Consciousness

People who feel connected to a community are generally healthier and happier. That is because having strong support systems makes it easier to move through life's challenging moments. Feeling a sense of belonging is an integral component of wellbeing.

Communities are typically comprised of people with shared interests and values. Most likely, your community includes your family, neighbors, and a few others you interact with frequently. As you consider your own community, ask yourself this question: How connected are you?

One study conducted by the Pew Research Center¹ found that only about 30% of Americans know all or most of their neighbors, and a similar study found that more than half of residents living in Toronto, Canada only know a few of their neighbors.

Community consciousness, which is defined² as a community's "level of awareness of its current social, economic, and environmental situations," requires a willingness to branch out and become more aware of what is happening beyond your own family and inner circle. It requires acknowledging and accepting the diversity among members of your community, and it involves actively seeking common ground.

One way to expand your community consciousness is through volunteerism. Volunteering enables you to connect more deeply with others in your community. Having conversations with people outside your usual networks can expand your perspectives and give you more insight into the challenges that others face.

What will you do to build community consciousness?

In connected communities, everyone benefits. The more connected you feel, the more support you can give to others—and the more support you will receive in return.



1. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/how-urban-suburban-and-rural-residents-interact-with-their-neighbors/>

2. <https://www.shsu.edu/glt002/Outreach%20articles/Theodori%202004%20community%20activeness%20consciousness%20matrix.pdf>

How Small Moments of Empathy Affect Your Life

BY JILL SUTTIE |

A new study suggests that everyday experiences of empathy contribute to our well-being and kind behavior toward others.



Empathy is one of many skills that help us **build better relationships**. When we resonate with people's feelings, consider their perspective, or feel compassion for them, we are more likely to be **generous** and **altruistic**, and less likely to **be prejudiced** against them.

But empathy can sometimes feel like a lofty concept. While it may be good for us and others, what does it actually look like in real life, and how can we cultivate it? Findings from lab studies don't give us the full picture, often suffering from narrow definitions of empathy and not reflecting people's everyday empathy experiences. To fill this void in the research, Greg Depow at the University of Toronto and his colleagues conducted a **study** on people's experience with empathy in their everyday lives, to find out how it affected their actions and well-being. Their findings shed some interesting light on how small moments of ordinary, everyday empathy work to benefit us all.

Empathy is common—and not only for those who are suffering.

The study recruited 246 participants, representative in many ways of the United States' diverse population. Then, seven times a day for a week, participants were randomly prompted via cell phone to report on their current happiness level, sense of purpose, and overall well-being.

At each prompt, participants also noted if they'd had an empathy opportunity (someone expressing emotion in their presence), received or offered empathy, or performed a kind, helpful act for someone during the prior 15 minutes. If they had, they were asked to say how close they were to the other person involved, whether the empathy target's emotion was positive or negative, and whether they resonated with the person's feelings, took their perspective, or felt compassion for them separate elements of empathy sometimes studied in isolation. They also noted how difficult it was to empathize and how confident they were that they accurately understood the person's feelings.

Analyses of the responses showed that people tended to encounter empathy opportunities frequently, and that they empathized often in everyday life. On average, a person perceived about nine opportunities to empathize and six opportunities to receive empathy over 12 hours, and they empathized or received empathy about 88% of the time. They also tended to experience all of the elements of empathy simultaneously and to empathize more often with positive than negative emotion.

"This last finding was an unexpected result," says Depow, "because we usually think of empathy as a response to suffering. "



I was a little surprised that empathy was more common to positive emotions. But at the same time, there's some work saying that people experience positive emotions **about three times** more often than negative emotions, so it makes some sense," he says. People also empathized more with close others than strangers in everyday life. That's less surprising, says Depow, as people probably see intimates more often and have more opportunities for empathy. However, he says, people also spontaneously empathize with strangers.

He and his colleagues also found that people who noticed more empathy opportunities and empathized more reported greater happiness and well-being. However, these benefits were tied more to empathizing with others' positive feelings rather than negative feelings. And, if people were less confident in their ability to empathize or if empathizing was difficult, their well-being was lower. So, that raises the question: Is empathy good or bad for us? It could be a bit of both, depending on the situation, says Depow.

"Overall, empathy, in a multidimensional framework, is good for well-being," he says. "But, when people have more opportunities to empathize with negative emotions—and some people have them consistently and repeatedly, like doctors in emergency care, for example—those can be risk factors for personal distress." In those situations, we may need to take steps to **protect ourselves** from the distress that can come with empathy. Still, Depow is more for empathy being a positive than a negative in our lives.



“To really share positive emotions seems to be good for us,” he says. “That means feeling joy with the other person—rather than feeling bad about yourself because you’re not doing as well—could be a good opportunity to increase your well-being.”



Everyday empathy and helping others

In Depow’s study, people practiced more kindness toward others at times when they experienced more empathy—no matter whether positive or negative emotions were shared. Again, he found this to be particularly noteworthy, as so much research on empathy and compassion focuses on witnessing others in need.

“Empathy is not always about engaging with the suffering of others,” he says. “We also use it often to connect with other people’s happiness, and that can be a way of feeling connected to those around us, too.”

Interestingly, not just showing empathy but also *receiving* empathy from another led to more kindness and helpfulness. Depow isn’t sure why that would be, and research has not focused a lot on how receiving empathy affects our behavior. But it could just have to do with how an empathic interaction increases our sense of community.



How to Recharge Your Body and Mind

Do you feel overwhelmed? It may be a sign that you need to recharge. Endless to do lists, double-booked calendars, and ongoing family responsibilities can leave you feeling depleted. Burnout can creep up quickly, and often at the most inconvenient times. That is why it is essential to create space to recharge your body and mind on a regular basis.

Here are some things you can try when you need to recharge:

Do therapeutic yoga

Therapeutic yoga² has been shown to improve flexibility, strength, and even lung function. The movements commonly associated with yoga also help relieve muscle tension.

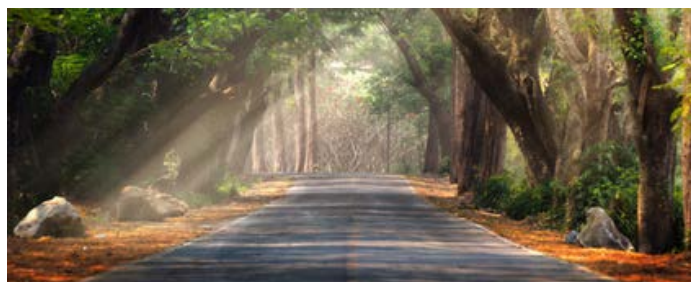


Take a cold shower

Being immersed in cold water causes blood vessels to constrict, thereby increasing blood flow. This increases the amount of oxygen that gets supplied to your cells, and helps remove toxins more quickly. Athletes are known to use ice baths and cold showers as a way to speed up the post-workout recovery process.

Get some nature therapy

Spending time outside in nature, sometimes referred to as forest bathing, has shown³ promising results with reducing depression, anxiety, and fatigue. The simple act of taking a walk outside can be an effective way to clear your mind and find creative solutions to problems.



Sleep

Getting at least seven hours of restful sleep each day is essential for good health. Sleep enhances cognitive function, which is essential for good problem-solving and reasoning skills.



Take some time to experiment with different recharging strategies to see which ones are the most effective for you.

2. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-healing-works/201905/how-recharge-your-mind-and-body-therapeutic-yoga>

3. <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/spend-time-in-nature-to-reduce-stress-and-anxiety>



Protect Your Energy with Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries protect your energy. They represent your limits and communicate to others what is and what is not okay. Healthy boundaries can improve your relationships, and they can also preserve your energy for the things you value most.

Even so, boundary-setting can be awkward. Saying no means you might end up disappointing some people you care about, but it also makes it possible for you to allocate your energy more effectively and efficiently.

Here are three easy steps for setting healthy boundaries:

Define your boundaries.

Get clear about what is acceptable and what is not. For example, is it okay for your friend to call you in the middle of the night with a non-emergency issue? Is it okay for a colleague to demand something at the last minute? Knowing your limits is the first step to setting a boundary.

Communicate your boundaries.

Next, you will need to communicate your boundary. While it would be nice if others could read your mind, they cannot. You have to be clear about your boundaries if you expect others to respect them.

Honor your boundaries.

Boundaries are nothing more than ideas unless you honor and enforce them. You must be willing to be vocalize when someone violates a boundary, and take necessary action to correct the situation when possible and appropriate. Declining unreasonable requests, suggesting alternative solutions, and having honest, uncomfortable conversations are all forms of enforcing boundaries.



Boundary-setting is a delicate art that requires practice. It can take time to build skills in this area. It is not necessary to be curt or abrasive when setting boundaries. In fact, you will be much more effective when you do it with grace and kindness.





How to Ask for Help

Asking for help seems to come naturally for some, but for others, it is anything but easy. The need to feel independent is a highly valued virtue, especially in professional settings.

Even so, trying to do it all alone seldom produces the best outcomes. When you are chronically exhausted and overwhelmed, you are unable to deliver your best work, so knowing how to ask for help is vital.

To ask for help, you first need to know how to recognize when you need it. This may require you to pay more attention to how you respond in certain situations. How do you respond to stress? How do you know when you have reached your limit? The answers can help you understand when you need help.

Getting comfortable with asking for help can take time, but it can make your life a whole lot easier.

Here are some tips for when you need to ask for help:

Recognize when you need help

Know your limits and manage your energy wisely. When it comes to asking for help, the earlier the better.

Be clear about what you need

When you do ask for help, explain exactly how the other person can help you. What specifically do you need help with?

Ask the right person

Seek help from someone who possesses the specific skills needed for the task at hand. Otherwise, you might end up further behind.

Be helpful in return

Extend help to others when you see them struggling. Just remember to always get permission first. Your help may not be as needed or wanted as you think it is. Jumping in to “fix” other people’s problems for them without their permission can backfire.





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Key Lime Pie Energy Bars

INGREDIENTS

- 20 pitted deglet dates (or 10 medjool dates, pitted)
- 3/4 cup whole almonds
- 3/4 cup raw cashews
- 1/4 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- Zest of 2 limes
- Juice of 1 lime
- Pinch of sea salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place all ingredients into the bowl of a food processor.
2. Process until mixture is crumbly yet still holds together well when pinched between your fingers. If mixture is too dry, add another date and process again or add a splash of water. If mixture is too wet, add a few more nuts and process again until crumbly.
3. Press mixture onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet forming a square about 9 x 9 inches (or roll them between your hands to form them into 16 balls). Place bars in the fridge to chill if they seem sticky.
4. Cut into 12 bars. Wrap in parchment paper and store in a covered container in the fridge for up to 1 week.



Total Time (Cook and Prep):
30 minutes

Servings: 16 balls or 12 bars



NUTRITION INFO

(per serving/1 bar or 2 balls)

Calories 146 kcal
Carbs 19g
Fat 8g
Protein 3g
Sodium 14mg
Sugar 14g

Source:
<https://therealfoodrds.com/key-lime-pie-energy-bars/>

Resource Advisor is here with help for life's issues



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Resource Advisor is a member assistance program that's included with your life and/or disability benefit. It provides resources and services to support you and your household family members when you may need it.

Counseling by phone, face-to-face, or LiveHealth Online video chat

If you're feeling stressed, worried, or going through a tough time, you may want someone to talk to. You and your household family members can call Resource Advisor anytime, 24/7, and talk with a licensed counselor:

- **By phone:** Call **1-888-209-7840**.
- **In-person:** You can call to set up face-to-face sessions and then schedule appointments directly with your counselor.
- **Video visit:** You can talk with a counselor from the convenience of your home or wherever you have internet access and privacy using LiveHealth Online. To set up a LiveHealth Online visit, call Resource Advisor. You will receive details about how to schedule a visit, along with a coupon code that gives you LiveHealth Online visits at no extra cost to you.

You can review a therapist's background and qualifications to help choose one who is available and right for you.

You and your family members are eligible for up to three counselor visits for each issue or concern, at no extra cost.

Counselors can help with:

- Stress
- Parenting
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Issues that affect your well-being
- Dealing with illness
- Relationship or family issues
- Help finding child care
- Elder care issues and resources

Support when you need it

Contact Resource Advisor:

- **Phone:** 1-888-209-7840
- **Online:** www.ResourceAdvisor.Anthem.com
(Log in with program name AnthemResourceAdvisor.)

Helpful resources you can count on

Financial planning

Call Resource Advisor to set up one-on-one financial counseling with a certified professional financial planner. They can help with issues like retirement planning and saving for a child's education.

Legal services

With a call to Resource Advisor, you can schedule a consultation with an attorney over the phone at no charge. If you want to meet with an attorney in person, the legal consultant can set up an appointment at a discounted fee.

Identity theft recovery and monitoring

Resource Advisor has fraud resolution specialists who can help if your identity is stolen. They can work with creditors, collection agencies, law firms, and credit reporting agencies for you for up to one year. You can sign up for ID monitoring, receive credit report reviews, and place fraud alerts on credit reports no matter how many times your identity is compromised.

Call 1-888-209-7840 for financial, legal, and identity theft recovery and monitoring services.

Online tools to help with life's issues

The Resource Advisor website has tools to help with life's challenges, such as:

- Creating a will
- Parenting
- Aging
- Healthy living
- Household support
- Referrals
- Funeral planning

To access resources, visit www.ResourceAdvisor.Anthem.com and use the program name "AnthemResourceAdvisor."

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— no matter how big or small**

**Call 1-888-209-7840 or visit
www.ResourceAdvisor.Anthem.com to receive
support and guidance, whenever you may need**

1. The range of preventive care services covered at no cost share when provided by plan doctors is designed to meet state and federal requirements. The Department of Health and Human Services decided which services to include for full coverage based on U.S. Preventive Services Task Force A and B recommendations, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and certain guidelines for infants, children, adolescents, and women supported by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Guidelines. You may have additional coverage under your insurance policy. To learn more about what your plan covers, see your Certificate of Coverage or call the Member Services number on your ID card.

2. Prescriptions determined to be a "controlled substance" (as defined by the Controlled Substances Act under federal law) cannot be prescribed using LiveHealthOnline. Psychiatrists on LiveHealthOnline will not offer counseling or talk therapy.

3. LiveHealthOnline appointments are subject to availability. Online counseling is not appropriate for all kinds of problems. If you are in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, it's important that you seek help immediately. Please call 800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) or 911 for help. If your issue is an emergency, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. LiveHealthOnline does not offer emergency services.

LiveHealthOnline is the trade name of Health Management Corporation, a separate company, providing telehealth services on behalf of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Note about eligibility: This program is for active employees and their household family members. All benefits end at retirement.

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