

Evidence-Based Foundations of the 7 Days of Connection Workout

The 7 Days of Connection workout focuses on deepening interpersonal bonds and enhancing social connectedness, which are critical components of mental fitness. This program is designed to guide participants through daily exercises that strengthen relationships, foster gratitude, and promote meaningful interactions. By encouraging small actions each day, this workout offers participants an opportunity to establish and nurture relationships that can contribute to long-term emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Social connectedness, specifically, has been shown to enhance mental health by reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of support. Research underscores that engaging in daily connection-focused activities can improve psychological well-being, build social resilience, and reduce stress responses.

Our 7 Days of Connection workout promotes evidence-based techniques to help participants build stronger connections and develop lasting habits for enhancing social wellbeing.



THE SCIENCE OF MENTAL FITNESS

The Mental Fitness Gym takes an evidence-based approach to building mental fitness, equipping participants with the tools and inspiration to strengthen emotional muscles. Mental fitness refers to our capacity to cope with life's ups and downs, feel connected to others, and seek support when needed. Our approach centres on improving three proven mental health protective factors: emotional adaptability, social connectedness, and help-seeking behaviour.

Backed by research in psychology and behavioural science, the Mental Fitness Gym promotes preventative actions and habits to build mental fitness. Our research-driven approach supports people in managing mild mental health challenges while building sustainable habits for wellbeing.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- **Enhanced social support and reduced loneliness:** Studies indicate that strong social connections serve as a buffer against stress and can reduce symptoms of loneliness and anxiety. By promoting intentional connections, this workout strengthens participants' sense of support.
- **Increased gratitude and emotional positivity:** Engaging in daily acts of gratitude has been shown to improve emotional resilience. Gratitude-focused exercises within the workout can foster positive emotions, enhancing wellbeing.
- **Strengthened communication skills:** Participants practise open and meaningful communication with loved ones, which has been linked to improved mental health outcomes and relationship satisfaction.



- **Development of connection building habits:** By engaging in small daily actions, participants create habits that promote ongoing social connectedness, ultimately contributing to a supportive community and personal resilience.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING DAILY ACTIVITIES

Day 1: Connecting with yourself

Research highlights that self-reflection and recognising personal sources of joy are integral for self-awareness and mental health. This self-connection acts as a foundation for building healthy relationships. *Brown, K.W., & Ryan, R.M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*

Day 2: Building your support network

Social support has been shown to reduce stress and improve well-being. Identifying key supportive relationships fosters resilience and a sense of belonging. *Taylor, S.E. (2011). Social support: A review. In H. S. Friedman (Ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Health Psychology. Oxford University Press.*

Day 3: Expressing appreciation

Expressing gratitude strengthens bonds and promotes relationship satisfaction, with evidence linking gratitude to improved mental health and lower stress. *Algoe, S.B., & Haidt, J. (2009). Witnessing excellence in action: The “other-praising” emotions of elevation, gratitude, and admiration. The Journal of Positive Psychology.*

Day 4: Fostering gratitude in relationships

Positive relationship-focused gratitude improves interpersonal interactions and enhances well-being by reinforcing positive memories and feelings. *Emmons, R.A., & McCullough, M.E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*

Day 5: Meaningful conversations

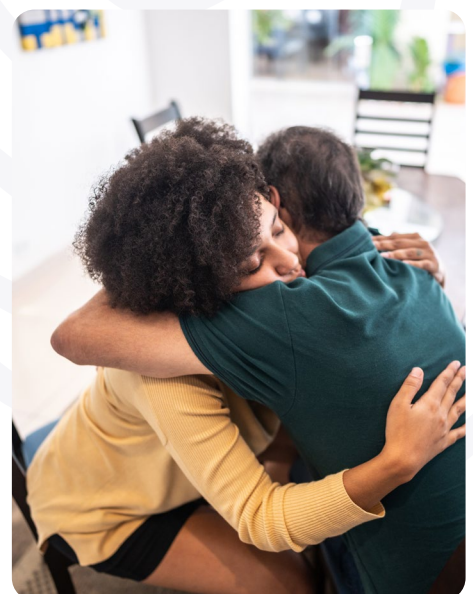
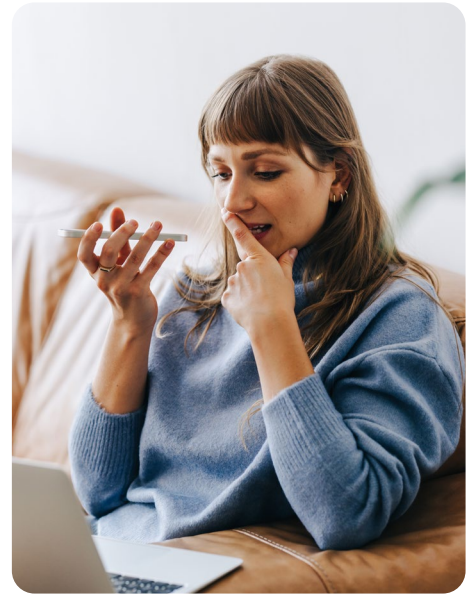
Engaging in deeper conversations, rather than small talk, has been shown to increase feelings of wellbeing and connection. *Reis, H.T., Sheldon, K.M., Gable, S.L., Roscoe, J., & Ryan, R.M. (2000). Daily well-being: The role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26(4), 419-435.*

Day 6: Active listening

Studies emphasise that active listening promotes empathy and connection by validating the speaker's feelings and creating a sense of trust and understanding. *Weger, H., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. International Journal of Listening, 28(1), 13-31.*

Day 7: Physical affection and connection

Physical touch, such as hugging, can reduce stress by releasing oxytocin and enhancing feelings of closeness and happiness. *Field, T. (2010). Touch for socioemotional and physical wellbeing: A review. Developmental Review.*



Daily references

Each day's activity in the 7 Days of Connection workout is rooted in research supporting the benefits of social connection, gratitude, and active listening. By promoting these daily practices, we aim to build a strong foundation for participants to continue fostering meaningful relationships.

For detailed information on these studies and evidence, please refer to the full articles cited above.



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Disclaimer

The information in our Mental Fitness Gym Workouts is not intended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Gotcha4Life does not provide counselling or crisis support services. You can connect with mental health professionals for confidential 1-on-1 support and advice by calling Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 at any time or visit beyondblue.org.au. If someone you care about is experiencing emotional distress, please contact Lifeline who are there to listen and support you, 24 hours a day on 13 11 14. If someone's life is in danger, call 000.

For additional information and detailed references, please refer to the full articles and studies.