

Week 23 HANDOUT A

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Social support systems are an important part of our lives. These systems include anyone we trust and can go to for help, advice, or any other type of emotional support. Your social support system may be made up of your friends and family members.

Social support provides a sense of belonging, security and a welcoming forum in which to share your concerns and needs. And you may get just as much out of friendships and social networks where you're the source of comfort and companionship, too.

One of the most important factors in mental and emotional health is having a support system that understands us and can help us work through problems. Support systems can give us advice, help us to learn new skills, keep us on the right track, and hold us accountable to do what needs to be done.

Some estimates say we should have at least 5 different support sources that we can turn to, and fortunately there are numerous outlets to begin building a support system.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM?

- Alleviating stress –
 - A strong social support system can alleviate stress by providing individuals with another person to share their problems with.
 - When individuals have someone to confide in who cares about what they are saying and listen to their problems, they may find it easier to deal with whatever challenges they are facing.
 - In addition, people in an individual's support system may be able to give ideas or recommendations for how to overcome life's challenges.
- Increasing a person's self confidence and feelings of value –
 - Being part of a strong social support system can make an individual feel loved and important.

- Individuals can listen to the challenges of others in their support system and may even have ideas about how their friends can overcome these challenges.
- Feeling valued by other people can increase an individual's self confidence and self esteem – this contributes to good mental health.
- Decreasing feelings of loneliness and isolation –
 - When you are isolated, your abuser is in a better position to control you and the way you feel about yourself, as well as your perceptions about the abuse and your options. The more you can talk with others, the less power your abuser is likely to have.
 - Social support systems can also be fun! Individuals can call on members of their social support system when they want to participate in an activity or just talk about what is going on in their lives.
 - Without friends and other social supports many people are more likely to feel lonely, isolated, and bored – this can increase risk for developing mental health conditions such as depression.