

# Learner Guide

- Use on your own or with others, to extend your learning on the topic
- Tool for bringing this work to your library practice
- Increase motivation and set attainable goals
- Connect your learning to practical application
- Customize with your own questions!

## Libraries as Social Connectors: Responding to the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

This collection of resources and action steps can be used to reflect and take notes, and to identify steps to take action on deepening social connection for your community. Bring the guide to your team and community, feel free to revise, and make it your own. See also: <https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/libraries-foster-social-connection.html>

### Why focus on social connection?

#### Reading

[Surgeon General's Advisory on Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](#) (pdf), May 2023

- Press Release [New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States](#), May 2023
- Video overview: <https://youtu.be/B8pa5068Fk4>
- [Factors That Can Shape Social Connection](#) (pdf)

#### Take Action

- Review the six foundational pillars of the framework for a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection (more details in Press Release or on p. 47 of Advisory) and identify places you see overlap with your library's mission and vision.

##### Six foundational pillars:

1. Strengthen Social Infrastructure
2. Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies
3. Mobilize the Health Sector
4. Reform Digital Environments
5. Deepen Our Knowledge
6. Cultivate a Culture of Connection

- Use the Surgeon General's Advisory to bring discussion about the loneliness epidemic to your colleagues and community stakeholders.



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January 2024

## **Libraries Foster Social Connection: Responding to the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation**

Brooke Doyle and Jennifer Peterson  
WebJunction

Let's stay connected! **#libsocialconnect**

# What's your [social isolation] story?



# Factors That Can Shape Social Connection



## Individual

- Chronic disease
- Sensory and functional impairments
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Personality
- Race
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Life stage

## Community

- Outdoor space
- Housing
- Schools
- Workplace
- Local government
- Local business
- Community organizations
- Health care
- Transportation

## Relationships

- Structure, function, and quality
- Household size
- Characteristics and behaviors of others
- Empathy

## Society

- Norms and values
- Public policies
- Tech environment and use
- Civic engagement
- Democratic norms
- Historical inequities

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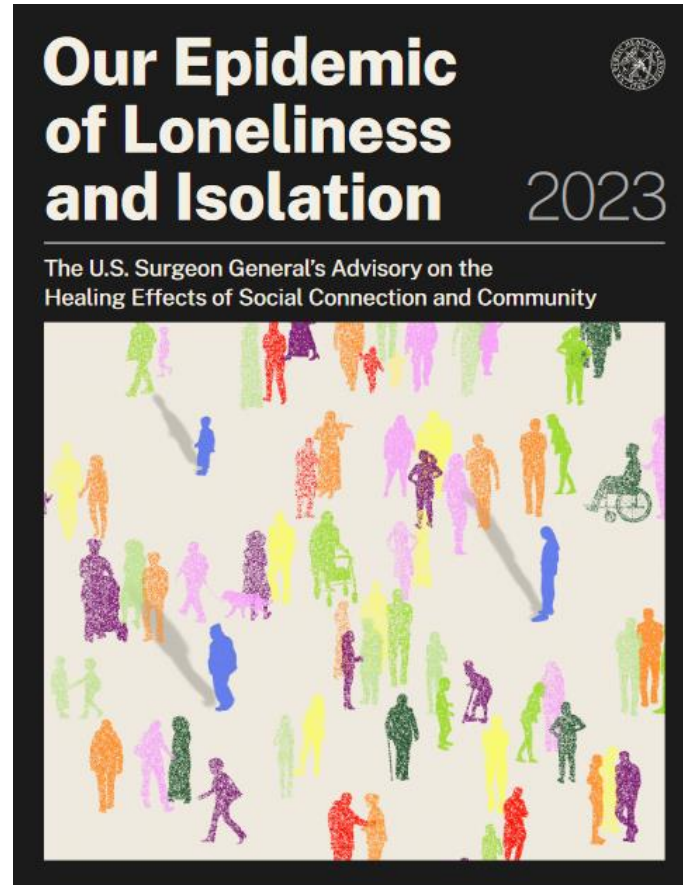
# WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL CONNECTION?

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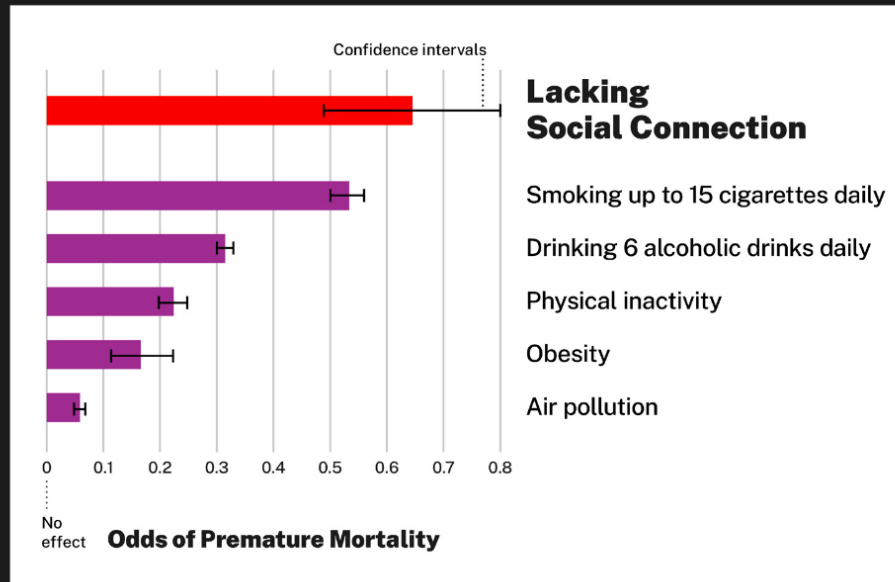


# Surgeon General's Advisory

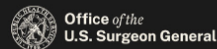
- Social connectedness: one of the fundamental social determinants of health
- Approximately half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness (before COVID!)
- Framework for a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection



# Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.



Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States. *American Psychology*. 2017;72(6):517-530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103. This graph is a visual approximation.



Office of the  
U.S. Surgeon General



# Global issue

“World Health Organization announced a new Commission on Social Connection, to address loneliness as a pressing health threat, promote social connection as a priority and accelerate the scaling up of solutions in countries of all incomes.”

[WHO launches commission to foster social connection](https://www.who.int/news/2023/11/15/who-launches-commission-to-foster-social-connection)  
15 November 2023



**The WHO Commission on Social Connection** aims to catalyse global leadership in the area.

It will do so by increasing the priority of social connection as a public health issue, setting the agenda, and scaling up effective solutions.



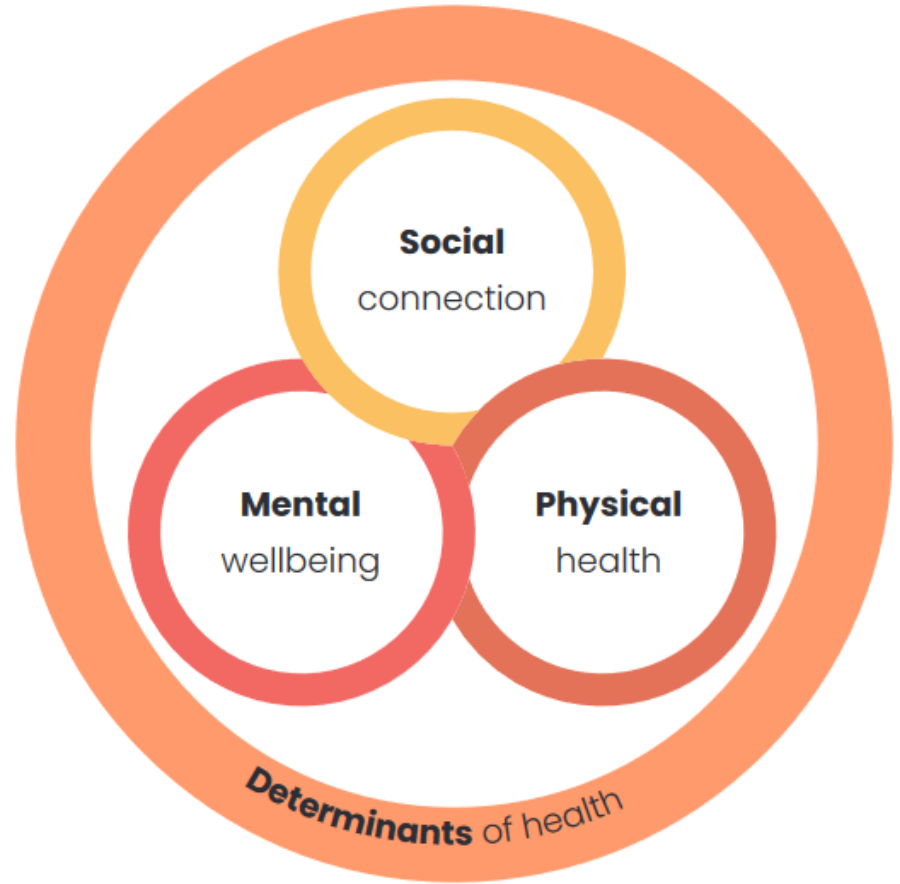
# Victoria Libraries

## Libraries for Health and Wellbeing

- A **strategic framework** to articulate the role of public libraries and guide their work in support of community health and wellbeing outcomes
- **Deep research** to demonstrate the impact of public libraries on community health and wellbeing
- Targeted **staff training**
- A **statewide** community health and wellbeing program

[Libraries for Health and Wellbeing: A strategic framework for Victoria public libraries towards 2024 \(2021\)](#) (pdf)

[Libraries for Health and Wellbeing: A Partnerships Toolkit \(2022\)](#) (pdf)



# Prescription

“While the epidemic of loneliness and isolation is widespread and has profound consequences for our individual and collective health and well-being, there is a medicine hiding in plain sight: **social connection.**”

- United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy

# Results of more social connection

“Social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being.”

- Lowered anxiety and depression
- Stronger immune system
- Faster recovery from illness
- Increased chance of longevity
- Higher self-esteem, greater empathy

Source: [Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection](#); Dr. Emma Seppala; Stanford Medicine; May 8, 2014

# Project UnLonely

## Five Territories of Loneliness

- Trauma
- Illness
- Aging
- Difference
- Modernity

## Three-fold goal

1. Promote awareness
2. Reduce stigma
3. Activate programming

Treat loneliness with: **curiosity, creativity,**  
and **conversation**

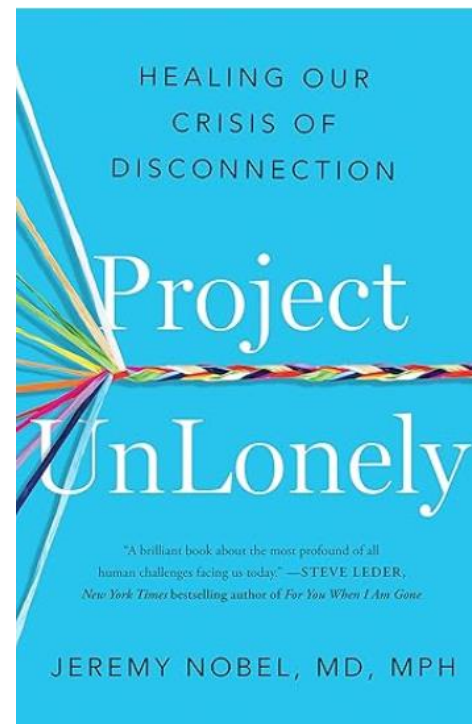
## Explore:

[Project UnLonely](#)

[Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection](#) - book

[Project UnLonely Films](#)

[Colors & Connection](#)



# National Strategy to Advance Social Connection

Surgeon General's Advisory lays out a framework based on six foundational pillars:

1. **Strengthen Social Infrastructure:** physical elements of a community (parks, **libraries**, playgrounds)
2. **Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies:** National, state, local, and tribal governments
3. **Mobilize the Health Sector:** Because loneliness and isolation are risk factors for several major health conditions (including heart disease, dementia, depression) as well as for premature death
4. **Reform Digital Environments:** critically evaluate our relationship with technology
5. **Deepen Our Knowledge:** A more robust research agenda
6. **Cultivate a Culture of Connection:** the norms and culture of how we engage one another



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# WHY LIBRARIES?

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# Libraries as social connectors

By applying an **intentional** focus on opportunities for deeper social connections, libraries can play a critical role in helping to counter social isolation.



Photo: Cornwall Public Library Smart Space, used with permission

# Libraries foster social cohesion

- People forge bonds in healthy, trusted infrastructure
- Open and inclusive
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Compassionate policies
- Nurture civility
- Cultures of learning, improving self and society

[Palaces for the People](#), Eric Klinenberg, 2018

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**WHAT ARE YOU ALREADY DOING  
TO FOSTER SOCIAL  
CONNECTION AT YOUR LIBRARY?**

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# Relationships for Social Connection

- Staff
- Trustees/Boards
- Local officials/community partners
- Volunteers/Friends
- Teens
- Youth
- Parents and caregivers
- Older patrons
- Non-English speakers or Multilingual Learners (MLL)
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing grief
- Who else?

# What Organizations and Communities Can Do to Promote Social Connectedness

- Community-based exercise and physical activity (**yoga, walking book club**)
- Technology and phone-based programs (**virtual meetings**)
- Health education, skill development, support groups, and peer support (**Coffee & Conversation, Grief Café, new parents support, older adults and caregivers**)
- School connectedness (**whole family literacy**)
- Intergenerational programs (**youth helping seniors with tech**)
- Animal-based interventions (**read to therapy dogs**)
- Built environment (**library gardens, StoryWalks**)

[What Organizations and Communities Can Do to Promote Social Connectedness](#), CDC



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# ADDING INTENTIONALITY

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# Tips from Priya Parker

“The way you structure and invite a conversation can be transformative and meaningful, and can build community wherever you are.”

- Priya Parker

“One of the most transformative books I’ve read in years.”

– DANIEL H. PINK, author of *When and Drive*

## THE ART OF GATHERING

HOW WE  
MEET AND  
WHY IT  
MATTERS

PRIYA PARKER

# Adding intention: Why are you gathering?

- What is your 'why'?
- What is your desired outcome?



Image by [Steve Buisinne](#) from [Pixabay](#)

# Adding intention: Make the invitation work for you

- Who should extend the invitation and in what form to reach the intended audience?
- Does the invitation match people to purpose?
- Do people know what to expect from the invitation?
- Does the invitation have emotional resonance?

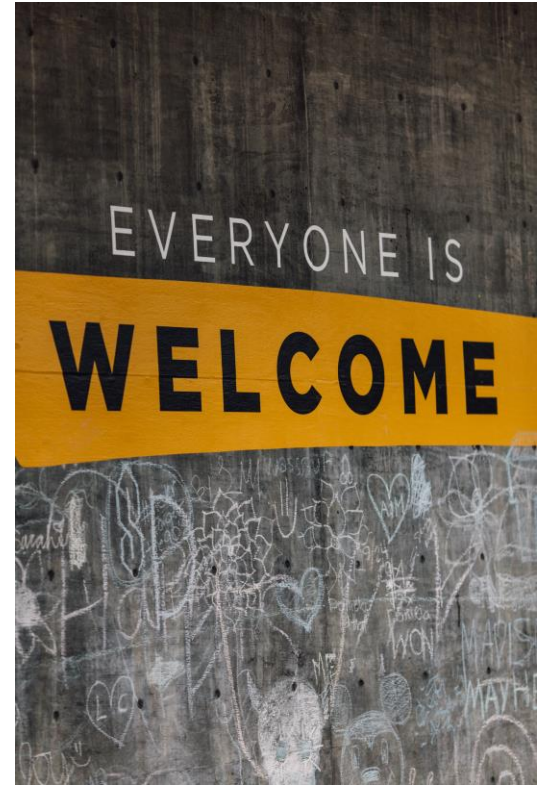


Photo by [Katie Moum](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Adding intention: A checklist for gatherings

- Have you designed for connection?
- Does your opening maximize the audience's captured attention?
- Have you helped people feel comfortable and safe enough to participate?
- Have you provided some time for reflection at the end?
- Does your closing elevate what you want people to remember most?



Photo by [Jamie Street](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Lessons on intentionality in planning today's session

- Make time for engagement in a 1-hour session
- Assess space for engagement
- Leverage other spaces, even outside the library, and allow for self-directed engagement
- Icebreakers and other question prompts (being inclusive) [Favorite Prompts: Icebreakers and other engaging questions](#)
- Added resource and action guide to support you moving forward



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# LIBRARY EXAMPLES USING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTION

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# Meeting Makeover

Add intention in designing for connection to your meetings

- Staff meetings
- Board and trustee meetings
- Community partners
- Teen Advisory



Photo by [airfocus](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Caregiver groups and circles

## Expectant & New Parent Circle

A community group for expectant & new parents to develop a support system, share stories & stresses, and create meaningful connections.

Meetings are held at the  
**Pike County Public Library-Milford Branch**  
the first Saturday of the Month  
at 10:30am.



For more information contact:  
programs@pepl.org

HEALTH  
LITERACY



## Autism Family Cares Family Support Group

When: Wednesday, September 12th, 2023

9:30 AM –11:30 AM

Where: Grayslake Area Public Library

100 Library Lane, Grayslake

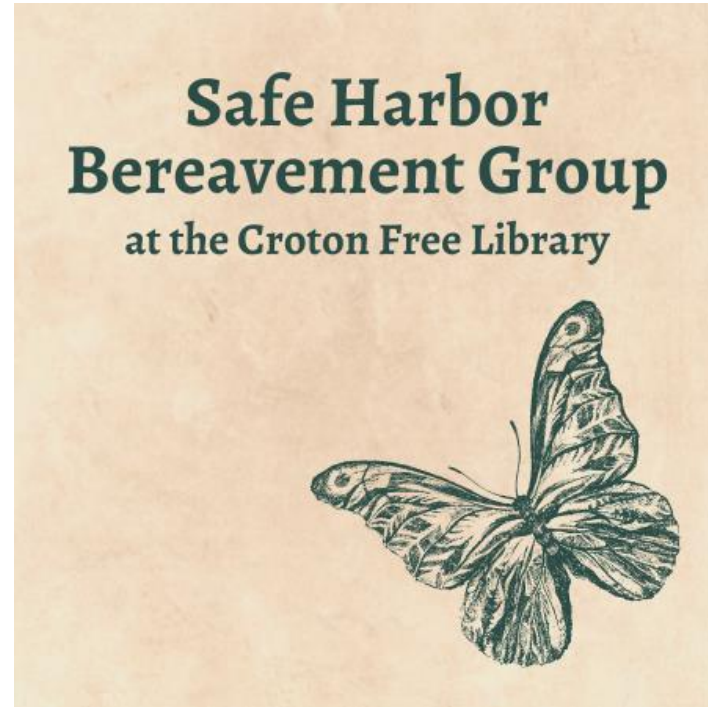
Come and join us for informal discussions on raising a child on the autism spectrum. Come late or leave early if needed. No RSVP is required.

<https://www.autismfamilycares.org/supportgroup>

# Grief Support and Death Cafes



<https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/events/death-cafe-west>  
<https://deathcafe.com/>



<https://www.crotonfreelibrary.org/event/safe-harbor-bereavement-group-30>

# World Café

## World Café Method and Hosting Tool Kit



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/webjunction/albums/72157600629661750/>

### I'm a Table Host, What Do I Do?

- Remind people at your table to jot down key connections, ideas, discoveries, and deeper questions as they emerge.
- Keep the conversation and pens flowing.
- Encourage everyone's participation.
- Remain at the table when others leave and welcome travelers from other tables.
- Briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so others can link and build using ideas from their previous tables.
- Summarize conversations and share with entire group.

*Rural Cafe*

#### THE QUESTION IS:

**What does it mean to have a library that is the hub of the community?**

Think about what this means for:

- 1) Library staff
- 2) Patrons
- 3) Entire community



<https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webjunction/Rural-Cafe-Menu-@-ALA-Rural-Forum-2007.pdf>

# Coffee & Conversation

**Humanize** those experiencing homelessness

**Reduce** misunderstandings

**Create** a space for open dialogue

**Connect** on commonalities

**Address** library concerns

**Have a good time!**

Program Model: Coffee & Conversation

from Dallas Public Library on the  
*Programming Librarian*



Learn more in WebJunction webinar:

<https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/community-connector.html>



# Tell Us: Communities Inspiring Libraries

- Madison Public Library's engagement strategy for Imagination Center planning (6+ year process)
- Over 750 people of all ages and backgrounds gathered at over 50 small conversations

- What are the communities represented in this room?
- What do you need to feel supported by your community?
- What local organizations or groups directly improve quality of life?
- What are the three biggest issues facing your community?
- What are some ideas to address these issues?
- How would you know things have gotten better?

**Tell  
Us!**

Help us plan for  
library service on  
Madison's west side.

[madpl.org/tellus](https://www.madpl.org/tellus)



[https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/sites/www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/files/media/Tell%20Us%20Packet%20-%20English\\_0.pdf](https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/sites/www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/files/media/Tell%20Us%20Packet%20-%20English_0.pdf)

# Don't forget passive engagement!



[Beyond the Survey – Basket of Discovery Tools](#) (pdf) and webinar  
[Getting to the Heart of the Community Through Discovery](#)



# Colorful Conversations



[Photo courtesy Shelton Timberland Library on Facebook](#)

See [Adult Coloring Explosion](#)


## Colorful Conversations

**Thursdays**  
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.  
for adults

Back by popular demand! Escape the chaos of daily life and connect with crayons, colored pencils, coloring pages and a cup of tea. Shelly Barnett, owner of Off the Walls! Gallery, will share how you can color your way to calm. There will be a different theme each month, some of which will have custom coloring sheets drawn just for that event!

*Light refreshments will be served. Supplies provided by members of the Retailers' Alliance of Downtown Shelton.*

**December 8**  
**January 12**  
**February 9**  
**March 9**  
**April 13**



Timberland  
Regional  
LIBRARY

Shelton Timberland Library  
William G. Reed Public Library  
710 W. Alder St.; (360) 426-1362; [www.TRL.org](http://www.TRL.org)

[Flyer courtesy Shelton Timberland Library on Facebook](#)



Image courtesy: Johnson County Library

# Explore the Bridgebuilding Resource Hub



[oc.lc/bridge-building](https://oc.lc/bridge-building)

# Time to Connect – Action Planning

Pick a partner at the library to think through:

- Your target audience for a gathering
- How to be more intentional with social connection
- Prompts for social engagement in session (e.g., ice breaker)
- Concerns or opportunities

# Remember...

- Strategies will vary by library and/or the different groups you're working with
- Intentionally weaving in social connection may take a few tries
- Your skills in designing for social connection will grow over time, and you'll gain skills and confidence as you go!



Image by [kalhh](#) from [Pixabay](#)

# One word

What's one word that describes how you're feeling about adding intention to deepen social connection in your library's work?

# Intentionality is the secret sauce

“Gatherings crackle and flourish when real thought goes into them, when (often invisible) structure is baked into them, and when a host has the **curiosity, willingness, and generosity of spirit** to try.”

— Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*



# THANK YOU!

Stay connected – Share what you're doing  
to foster social connection!

**#libsocialconnect**



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