Connection-Centered Practice

Therapeutic Alliance & Relational Excellence in SUD Treatment

Intensives Library · Communication & Connection

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Part 1 · Overview

Connection-Centered Practice

The therapeutic relationship is the most powerful predictor of treatment outcomes in SUD care. Connection-centered practice places the quality of human connection at the heart of every clinical interaction, developing the specific behaviors and mindsets that create genuine therapeutic alliance.

Learning Slides

Connection frameworks, therapeutic alliance research, and relational competencies.

Mind Map

Visual mapping of connection dimensions across the therapeutic relationship.

Self-Assessment

Evaluate your connection-centered practice depth and consistency.

Worksheet

Practical exercises for deepening connection-centered clinical skills.

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Part 2 · Slides

Connection-Centered Recovery

Building Community and Relationships in Substance Use Disorder Treatment

A comprehensive implementation guide for treatment centers

The Recovery Files - Embrace, Empower & Evolve

Isolation as Core Driver of Addiction

- 1Substance use disorders often develop and persist in contexts of profound social isolation and disconnection
- 2Addiction creates progressive deterioration of meaningful relationships, creating vicious cycle of loneliness and use
- 3Traditional treatment focuses on individual pathology while underaddressing the relational wounds that fuel continued use

The Human Need for Belonging

- 1Humans are fundamentally social beings with neurobiological needs for connection and belonging
- 2Meaningful relationships activate reward systems naturally, reducing dependence on substance-based reward
- 3Recovery requires rebuilding capacity for healthy connection, not just eliminating substances

Beyond Support Groups - Community as Medicine

- 1While support groups are valuable, comprehensive recovery requires broader community integration
- 2Therapeutic communities create healing environments where relationships themselves become treatment modalities
- 3Connection-centered approaches leverage peer relationships as primary change agents

Neurobiological Basis of Connection

- 1Healthy relationships activate oxytocin and dopamine systems, naturally supporting recovery
- 2Social connection reduces stress hormones that often trigger relapse episodes
- 3Interpersonal safety allows nervous system regulation essential for sustained sobriety

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Accountability Through Relationship

- 1Peer accountability creates motivation beyond individual willpower or fear-based compliance
- 2Mutual responsibility fosters sense of purpose and meaning that supports long-term engagement
- 3Authentic relationships provide immediate feedback and support during vulnerable moments

Skill Development Through Community

- 1Real-life relationship challenges provide natural opportunities for practicing recovery skills
- 2Peer learning accelerates skill acquisition through modeling and peer teaching
- 3Community problem-solving develops interpersonal competencies essential for post-treatment success

Structured Peer Bonding

- 1Systematic implementation of daily community meetings and team-building activities
- 2Buddy systems and accountability partnerships ensuring no one recovers in isolation
- 3Group cohesion activities that develop shared identity and collective purpose

Peer Leadership and Empowerment

- 1Training patients in support group facilitation and peer mentorship skills
- 2Rotating leadership opportunities that develop confidence and investment in community
- 3Special interest groups that address specific demographic needs and cultural identities

Collaborative Projects and Shared Purpose

- 1Community service initiatives that connect recovery to broader social contribution
- 2Creative and media projects that foster teamwork and collective achievement
- 3Problem-solving activities that develop cooperation and communication skills

Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills

- 1Proactive conflict resolution training recognizing interpersonal challenges as growth opportunities
- 2Peer mediation programs that teach negotiation and compromise skills
- 3Communication workshops that develop emotional intelligence and relationship maintenance abilities

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Digital Platform Integration

- 1Secure online forums and treatment center apps that extend support beyond face-to-face contact
- 2Virtual alumni connections that maintain long-term relationship networks
- 3Digital communication skills training that promotes healthy online relationship habits

Informal Connection Opportunities

- 1Structured leisure activities including game nights, cultural experiences, and hobby groups
- 2Natural relationship development through shared interests and passions
- 3Rediscovering joy in sober socializing and building healthy leisure skills

From Individual to Community Focus

- 1Assessment of current programming for connection-building components versus individual-only interventions
- 2Staff training in facilitating community development and relationship building
- 3Environmental design that promotes interaction and relationship formation

Measuring Connection Outcomes

- 1Development of assessment tools that measure relationship quality and community engagement
- 2Tracking long-term alumni network participation and mutual support
- 3Evaluation of social skills development and interpersonal competency growth

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Part 3 · Mind Map

Connection-Centered Recovery Implementation Map

Strategic 4-Phase Implementation Timeline

This implementation map provides a comprehensive timeline for developing connection-centered programming. Follow the phases sequentially for systematic community building and relationship excellence.

Phase 1: Foundation Assessment and Culture Development

Weeks 1-8

Weeks 1-2: Current State Analysis

- Complete connection-centered assessment for current patient population
- Evaluate existing programming for relationship-building components
- Assess physical environment for connection-promoting features
- Survey staff about comfort level with facilitating community building
- Assess current group dynamics and community health indicators
- Review policies for connection-supportive versus connection-limiting approaches

Weeks 3-4: Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment

- Identify areas where systematic community building is lacking
- Analyze current conflict resolution and interpersonal skills training
- Evaluate peer leadership development and mentorship opportunities
- Review needs of different demographic groups for specialized community
- Assess cultural competency in facilitating diverse community connections
- Identify barriers to participation for specific populations

Weeks 5-6: Research and Best Practices Integration

- Research proven connection-centered interventions for addiction treatment
- Identify successful therapeutic community models
- Review literature on peer support and community healing approaches
- Evaluate digital platforms for extending community support
- Research secure forums, apps, and virtual connection systems
- Assess current alumni network and ongoing connection systems

Weeks 7-8: Program Design and Development

- Design daily community meeting structures and team-building activities
- Develop buddy system protocols and accountability partnership frameworks
- Create peer leadership training curriculum and rotation systems
- Design special interest groups for specific demographic communities
- Develop collaborative project frameworks and community service initiatives

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- Create conflict resolution training and peer mediation programs

Phase 2: Core Program Implementation

Weeks 9-16

Phase 3: Advanced Programming and Sustainability

Weeks 17-24

Phase 4: Sustainability and Continuous Development

Ongoing

Implementation Success Factors

Leadership & Culture

- Executive commitment to connection-centered philosophy
- Comprehensive staff training in group facilitation
- Ongoing supervision for complex relational interventions

Environment & Infrastructure

- Facility design that promotes interaction and gathering
- Technology infrastructure for virtual community connection
- Policies that actively support community building

Weeks 9-16

Weeks 9-10: Foundation Community Building Launch

- Launch structured daily community meetings with clear agendas
- Begin systematic team-building activities for group cohesion
- Implement buddy system with training and ongoing supervision
- Begin communication skills workshops focusing on active listening
- Launch basic conflict resolution training with practical exercises
- Implement group participation guidelines and social skills coaching

Weeks 11-12: Peer Leadership and Mentorship Development

- Launch peer leadership training program with systematic skill development
- Begin rotating leadership responsibilities in community meetings
- Implement peer mentorship program pairing experienced with newer participants
- Launch demographic-specific support groups (LGBTQ+, veterans, parents)
- Begin specialized programming addressing unique community needs
- Implement culturally competent facilitation approaches

Weeks 13-14: Collaborative Projects and Shared Purpose

- Launch community service initiatives connecting recovery to social contribution
- Begin collaborative creative projects including media production
- Implement problem-solving activities requiring cooperation

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- Introduce advanced conflict resolution techniques
- Begin role-playing exercises and interpersonal skills practice
- Implement real-time conflict coaching and relationship support

Weeks 15-16: Technology Integration and Extended Community

- Implement secure online forums and treatment center apps
- Begin virtual alumni connections and ongoing network development
- Launch digital communication skills training
- Begin structured leisure activities including game nights
- Launch cultural experiences and shared interest programming
- Implement natural relationship development through recreational activities

Weeks 17-24

Ongoing

Leadership & Culture

Weeks 9-16

Weeks 17-24

Weeks 17-18: Advanced Community Development

- Implement advanced group facilitation skills for peer leaders
- Begin complex project management and collaborative leadership
- Launch community governance and decision-making opportunities
- Develop advanced programming for specific trauma histories
- Implement specialized approaches for social anxiety
- Launch family and external community integration programming

Weeks 19-20: Conflict Resolution and Community Health

- Implement sophisticated conflict resolution and negotiation training
- Begin emotional intelligence and empathy development programming
- Launch relationship maintenance and long-term friendship building skills
- Develop systems for early identification of unhealthy group dynamics
- Implement community healing approaches for addressing conflicts
- Launch peer-led community health monitoring systems

Weeks 21-22: Long-term Connection and Transition Planning

- Enhance alumni network programming with ongoing connection support
- Implement mentorship connections between patients and alumni
- Develop long-term community participation opportunities
- Begin systematic planning for maintaining connections post-discharge
- Implement home community integration support
- Launch ongoing support system development training

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Weeks 23-24: Quality Assurance and Program Refinement

- Conduct thorough assessment of community development outcomes
- Analyze staff competency in facilitating connection-centered programming
- Evaluate technology platform effectiveness
- Develop long-term sustainability plans
- Create systems for ongoing program evaluation
- Implement staff development and training systems

Ongoing

Leadership & Culture

Weeks 9-16

Weeks 17-24

Ongoing

Monthly: Community Health Assessment

- Monitor patient connection assessment scores
- Track community participation rates and peer leadership
- Assess group cohesion indicators and community health metrics
- Regular staff training in connection-centered facilitation
- Monthly program fidelity assessment
- Ongoing resource and training needs assessment

Quarterly: Comprehensive Evaluation

- Comprehensive review of relationship development outcomes
- Analysis of correlation between connection programming and treatment success
- Evaluation of long-term recovery outcomes
- Quarterly strategic planning for program enhancement
- Integration of new evidence-based practices
- Planning for specialized programming adaptations

Annually: Strategic Review and Development

- Annual assessment of program impact on treatment outcomes
- Alumni network analysis and long-term connection outcomes
- Cost-benefit analysis and resource optimization
- Annual review and contribution to evidence base
- Research collaboration opportunities and publication planning
- Knowledge sharing with other treatment centers

Leadership & Culture

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Part 4 · Assessment

Basic Social Connection and Belonging

Community Integration and Sense of Belonging

1

I feel like I belong and am accepted in the treatment community.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

2

I have meaningful friendships with other people in recovery.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

3

I feel comfortable being myself around others in the program.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

4

I believe others genuinely care about my well-being and recovery.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

5

I feel connected to the group rather than isolated or on the outside.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

6

I trust that I can rely on others for support when I need it.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

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Selected: 3

7

I contribute positively to the community atmosphere and group dynamics.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Never (1)Rarely (2)Sometimes (3)Often (4)Always (5)

Selected: 3

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Relationship Building and Maintenance Abilities

1

I can express my thoughts and feelings clearly in group settings.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I listen actively and empathetically when others share their experiences.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I can handle disagreements or conflicts constructively without becoming defensive.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I'm comfortable asking for help when I need emotional or practical support.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I can offer support to others in ways that are helpful and appropriate.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I recognize social cues and respond appropriately in group interactions.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

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I can maintain boundaries while still being open and authentic with others.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

8

I'm developing skills for building and maintaining healthy relationships.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Accountability and Mutual Support

Responsibility to Others and Accepting Support

1

I feel accountable to my peers for my recovery actions and choices.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I'm comfortable being held accountable by others without becoming resentful.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I actively support others in their recovery goals and challenges.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I share honestly about my struggles rather than trying to appear perfect.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I can accept feedback from peers without becoming defensive or angry.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I follow through on commitments I make to the community and individuals.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

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I feel comfortable depending on others for support and encouragement.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Leadership and Peer Mentorship

Taking Initiative and Supporting Community Growth

1

I take initiative in group activities and community projects.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I feel comfortable taking on leadership roles when appropriate.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I actively mentor or support newer community members.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I contribute my unique skills and perspectives to group projects.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I help facilitate group discussions and activities when asked.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I model positive recovery behaviors for others to follow.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

I take responsibility for helping create a positive community atmosphere.
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving

Managing Interpersonal Challenges and Differences

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1

I can address interpersonal problems directly rather than avoiding them.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I seek win-win solutions when conflicts arise with others.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I can disagree with someone while still maintaining respect for them as a person.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I use conflict as an opportunity to deepen understanding rather than create distance.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I can apologize sincerely when I've made mistakes in relationships.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I work toward resolution rather than holding grudges or seeking retaliation.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

I can mediate or help others work through their interpersonal challenges.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Group Participation and Collaboration

Engagement in Community Activities and Projects

1

I actively participate in community meetings and group activities.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

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2

I contribute meaningfully to group projects and collaborative efforts.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I'm willing to compromise and work toward group consensus when needed.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I enjoy working with others toward common goals and shared projects.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I can balance my individual needs with the needs of the community.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I participate in both formal programming and informal social activities.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

I feel energized rather than drained by group participation.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Social Confidence and Authenticity

Comfort in Social Situations and Genuine Self-Expression

1

I feel comfortable in social situations without needing substances.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I can be authentic and genuine rather than trying to impress others.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

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3

I enjoy spending time with others and building friendships.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

4

I can handle social anxiety or awkwardness without withdrawing completely.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I'm developing interests and hobbies that I can share with others.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I feel confident initiating conversations and social interactions.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

I can maintain my sense of self while being part of a community.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Long-term Connection and Network Building

Future Relationship Planning and Ongoing Support Systems

1

I'm building relationships that I want to maintain after treatment.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

2

I have plans for staying connected to supportive people in recovery.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

3

I'm developing skills for making new friends and connections in my home community.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

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4

I believe I can maintain healthy relationships while staying sober.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

5

I'm interested in helping others in recovery even after I complete treatment.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

6

I feel confident about building a supportive social network in long-term recovery.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

7

I see connection and community as essential parts of my ongoing recovery plan.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Selected: 3

Scoring guide

Strong Connection-Centered Recovery Foundation

Score: 240 and above

Excellent community integration and relationship skills. Focus on maintaining connections and becoming a mentor for others developing these skills.

Good Connection Skills with Growth Opportunities

Score: 200 and above

Solid foundation with specific areas needing development. Identify lowest-scoring sections for targeted skill building.

Moderate Connection Development Needs

Score: 160 and above

Significant opportunities for relationship skill building and community engagement. Systematic connection programming recommended.

Low Connection Skills Requiring Intensive Support

Score: 120 and above

Major relationship and community engagement deficits. Comprehensive connection-building programming essential.

Crisis-Level Isolation and Connection Deficits

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Score: below the band above

Urgent need for intensive relationship and community building interventions. Consider specialized social skills track or additional therapeutic support.

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Part 5 · Worksheet

Connection-Centered Recovery Worksheet

Reflection Questions for Treatment Teams

Individual Connection Assessment

1. Connection History: Think about the relationships in your life before addiction significantly affected them. What qualities made those relationships meaningful? What skills did you use to build and maintain those connections?

2. Isolation Patterns: How did substance use affect your relationships and social connections? What patterns of isolation or relationship damage do you notice? What fears do you have about rebuilding relationships?

3. Current Community Experience: How do you experience being part of the treatment community? What makes you feel most connected or accepted? When do you feel most isolated or on the outside?

4. Authentic Self in Relationship: In what relationships or situations do you feel most like your authentic self? What allows you to be genuine versus when do you feel you need to pretend or perform?

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

1. Communication Strengths: What are your natural strengths in communication and relationship building? How do these strengths show up in your interactions with others in recovery?

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2. Communication Challenges: What aspects of communication or interpersonal interaction feel most challenging? What specific skills would you like to develop to improve your relationships?

3. Conflict Navigation: How do you typically respond when conflicts or disagreements arise in relationships? What would more effective conflict resolution look like for you?

4. Boundary Development: How comfortable are you with setting and maintaining healthy boundaries in relationships? Where do you struggle with being too rigid or too flexible with boundaries?

Accountability and Support Systems

1. Accountability Comfort: How do you feel about being accountable to others for your recovery actions? What makes accountability feel supportive versus burdensome or intrusive?

2. Support Giving and Receiving: Do you find it easier to give support to others or to receive support from others? What influences your comfort level with each of these?

3. Trust Development: How do you build trust with others? What helps you trust someone, and what helps others trust you? Where do you struggle with trust in relationships?

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4. Vulnerability and Authenticity: How comfortable are you with being vulnerable and sharing your struggles with others? What helps you feel safe enough to be authentic?

Leadership and Community Contribution

1. Leadership Comfort: In what situations do you naturally take leadership or initiative in the community? What holds you back from taking on more leadership roles?

2. Mentorship and Teaching: How do you feel about helping newer community members? What do you have to offer others, and how does helping others affect your own recovery?

3. Community Investment: How invested do you feel in the overall health and success of the treatment community? What motivates you to contribute to community well-being?

4. Unique Contributions: What unique perspectives, skills, or experiences do you bring to the community? How can you share these gifts in ways that strengthen the group?

Future Planning and Long-term Connections

1. Relationship Maintenance: How do you plan to maintain the important relationships you're building during treatment? What challenges might you face in staying connected?

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2. New Community Integration: How confident do you feel about building new relationships and integrating into communities outside of treatment? What skills or support would help you in this area?

3. Ongoing Support Systems: What kind of ongoing support system do you want to build for your long-term recovery? Who are the key people you want in your support network?

4. Giving Back: How do you want to help others in recovery as part of your ongoing journey? What role does service and mentorship play in your recovery vision?

Next Steps

After completing this worksheet, consider:

- Sharing your reflections with your therapist or support group
- Identifying 2-3 specific connection skills you want to develop
- Creating a personal action plan for building relationships
- Reviewing the Implementation Map for organizational guidance

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