



TBH Focus

Spirit | *Socialize*

- A robust social life can contribute greatly to brain health.
- Spending time with other people requires focus, quick thinking, and memory skills, and often involves activities that are intellectually engaging.
- Social support lowers depression risk and emotional distress, both of which can interfere with learning and memory.

The TBH Science

There are plenty of things we can do to stay sharp, boost brain health, preserve memory, and prevent dementia: Here's one “write” way: Pen an old-fashioned letter. Sharing our thoughts with someone else, even from a distance and indirectly (on paper) may yield the same mental benefits as socializing with others in person. In fact, when we keep to ourselves and *don't* make the effort to reach out and touch someone else, we cheat ourselves of both enjoyment and memory-saving opportunities, research has found. In one study, scientists at Harvard School of Public Health found that people who reported lower levels of interaction were more likely than their socially inclined peers to have memory problems after six years.

Composing a letter is also intellectually challenging and so may contribute to “cognitive reserve”—the growth of neurons (brain cells) and synapses (the pathways between those cells) that experts believe may serve as a “cushion” against future memory challenges.

You Will Need

- Samples of famous letters (see Resources)
- List of organizations that accept letters (see Resources)
- Stationery, cards, envelopes, and other letter-writing supplies
- Pens, pencils
- Stamps

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- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the many ways writing letters to others can benefit brain health and help maintain memory.
 - Discuss letter writing in general. Read a sample of some famous letters (see Resources) and have participants talk about what they tell us about the writer, the time period, the relationship between the writer and the recipient, etc. Next, invite folks to share their own letter-writing experiences.
 - Kick off an old-fashioned letter writing campaign! Have the group write letters to send through a chosen organization to military personnel, hospital patients, etc. (see Resources).
 - Have the group write anonymous letters that can be placed around your community for someone to find by chance a la www.loveletters.com (see Resources).
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- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the benefits of writing letters to others can benefit brain health and help maintain memory.
 - Choose one of the following activities:
 - ♦ Write a letter to send through a chosen organization (see Resources): military personnel, hospital patients, etc.
 - ♦ Write an anonymous letter for someone to find by chance a la www.loveletters.com (see Resources).
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TIP

Penning a letter to someone is a wonderful way to stay socially connected and to build “cognitive reserve”—new neurons and connections between them. Both benefits are proven ways to help prevent dementia and other memory problems, so boost your brain health by boosting someone else’s spirits: Compose a letter to send to a loved one or to a stranger who would benefit from cheerful note of encouragement (military personnel, hospital patient, etc.). Write on!

Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.