



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's a lot of value in keeping our calendars filled with dinner plans, walk-in-the-park dates, club meetings, and other social engagements: Hanging out with other folks is fun, but it's also a great way to keep our brains healthy and our thinking sharp, research shows. 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.

The benefits of socializing can be even richer when we're getting to know someone new. We can't really get to know another person without staying focused and thinking quickly and nimbly. Socializing also is intellectually engaging in that it exposes us to different viewpoints and experiences. Lastly, nurturing friendships with others lowers the risk of depression, stress, and other emotional distress—all of which have been linked to an increased risk of daily memory problems and even dementia.

As we age, it sometimes can be tough to expand our circle of friends and acquaintances. If we've always socialized with a spouse, for example, and he or she becomes ill and unable to go out, it can leave us housebound as well. Our current friends may also become less accessible—for example, by downsizing to a home that's farther away. For that reason, it's important to look for opportunities to meet new people—by volunteering, joining a club, taking a class, getting involved in a community project, and so on.

You Will Need

- The “Make New Friends” Worksheet (see Resources)



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about how a robust social life can benefit brain health and help maintain memory.
 - Using the “Make New Friends” Worksheet (see Resources), lead the group through the included icebreaker games.
 - If time allows, try other icebreaker games found through the online resources (see Resources).
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- Use one of the icebreaker exercises provided in the “*TBH Make New Friends Icebreaker Exercises*” Worksheet to engage your class in this activity.
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Even if you’ve never been a social butterfly, here’s a good reason to break out of your cocoon: Engaging in simple “getting to know you” chitchat is a great way to exercise your brain, by forcing you to focus on what the other person says, formulate follow-up questions and comments, and process new information. Not sure how to break the ice? Try asking, “What’s one thing about you that few others know?” Just be prepared with your own answer to the same question!



Resources

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