



# EXPLORING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND MENTAL WELLNESS

Each year as we enter the High Holy Day season, we begin to prepare – for reflection, planning and celebration. Our preparation and celebration have looked different over these past few years as we adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we enter the new year, we are thinking yet again about what this year will look like. In May 2023, the U.S. surgeon general released a new advisory on the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation and lack of connection in our country. With the holidays approaching and this public health crisis at hand, we must ask what our responsibility is to support ourselves and each other in fostering meaningful connection. The Jewish value, or middah

***kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh – כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה,***  
*All Jews are responsible for one another,*

is a reminder of our responsibility. It helps us understand we are interconnected and must be invested in the mental wellness and overall well-being of others. We must be willing and prepared to help one another, because when we connect to and support others, we all benefit.





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Social connection has an incredible impact on our overall health, both as individuals and as a community. Having stable and supportive connections as an individual leads to better physical and mental health outcomes such as longer life, better health and increased ability to cope with stress, anxiety and depression. Social connections also affect community health in a positive way by increasing a community's resiliency. Supportive and inclusive relationships in a community can lead to increased health and safety.

Elul, the last month of the year before the holidays, is often seen as a time of reflection and preparation before the new year.

***The word Elul shares a similar word root with the Aramaic word meaning "to search."***

During Elul, we can reflect on what it is we are searching for when it comes to our own social connection in light of the public health crisis. Take some time to reflect on your own needs.



- What type of connection is most meaningful and fulfilling for you?
- Are you getting what you need from your social connections right now?
- Are there things you can adjust to better meet your needs?
- How can you express to others what your needs are?





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In addition, you may find mutually beneficial comfort and support by reaching out to others who may be isolated, alone or less connected. We know people with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of loneliness and barriers to connection and belonging. In the spirit of kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh, we are responsible not only to ourselves but to our greater community. As we are searching for our own social connection, we must also support those around us who may be more isolated. If you have the bandwidth for extending yourself, consider taking one of the following steps:

- Talk with someone who you notice is alone.
- Call, text or email to check in on someone who you know has had a difficult year.
- Invite someone who is isolated to a social gathering, Shabbat dinner or holiday celebration.
- Plan a one-on-one get-together with someone who has barriers to connections.
- Offer a ride to someone who can't drive.
- Invite someone new to join a social or support group you attend. Understand they may have financial or other limitations in joining and reassure them they would be welcome at any point.
- Learn about someone's gift and talents and find ways to engage those talents so they can contribute to the community in a meaningful way.

**Friend's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Friend's Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Friend's Email:** \_\_\_\_\_





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Throughout Elul and the High Holy Day season, continue to reflect on your social connection needs and availability.

## Shanah tovah u'metukah!

Wishing you and your community a sweet new year filled with meaningful connection.

This resource was co-authored by: Carly Coons, LSW, Director of Education & Programming at the Blue Dove Foundation and Erica Baruch, Jewish Disabilities Advocates Advisor at JFS Jewish Disabilities Advocates Collaborative.



**The Blue Dove Foundation** was created to address mental illness and addiction in the Jewish community. Blue Dove has a vast array of resources connecting holidays and Judaism to mental health. You can access and explore these resources on your own or in community in the [Blue Dove Resource Library](#).



**JFS Jewish Disabilities Advocates (JDA)** was created to raise awareness and further inclusion of people with disabilities within Jewish organizations and the larger Jewish community. JDA has valuable resources to promote inclusion, connection and belonging for those with a broad range of disabilities and their families. You can explore the resources on a variety of topics on the [JDA homepage](#).