

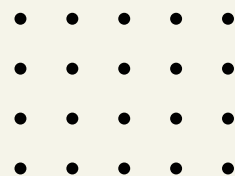
LIFEHACK

Expand your toolbox of life skills and strengthen your mental wellbeing



Main Module


Level up your social life





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How to Use this Workbook

LifeHack is a self-help programme in which you learn various life skills for all sorts of situations you might encounter in life. This program is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and consists of reading material and interactive exercises. Four domains are covered: your emotional well-being, your studies, your social life and your self-esteem.

Each domain consists of one main module and two related optional modules. The best way to do the programme is to complete one domain per week by doing the main module and any of the optional modules that seem relevant to you. Therefore, the whole programme will take approximately 4 to 6 weeks.

You can find a list of resources in the community [here](#) when you need support. Counselling and Psychological services are available at HKU for current students. It is free-of-charge, professional and confidential. Don't hesitate to seek help if needed.

Enquiries and Feedback
CEDARS – Counselling and Person Enrichment Section (CoPE)
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Level up your social life

Introduction

If there's one thing science has agreed on, it's that relationships matter. Whether friends, partner, family or other, healthy relationships are associated with better wellbeing and happiness. It'd be awesome if we could easily create deep connections and meaningful relationships with others, but in reality this can be a bit of a challenge at times.

So today, you'll...

- Learn how to build and/or improve your social circle in three steps:
- First, to better know and understand your social needs
- Second, to actually go out and meet new people to meet those needs
- Last, to learn how to strengthen your relationships through effective communication and vulnerability



Comic by [Poorly Drawn Lines](#)

Before we get into it: describe your personal goal(s) with regards to your social life / relationships. What would you like to achieve after doing this module? (answer A)

Let's go!

1. Know your needs

When we talk about building our social circle, it all starts with knowing our social needs so we can purposefully go after those things. What we like or don't like, what makes us feel comfortable, the things we get annoyed by - each of us has specific needs when it comes to social relationships. Knowing our needs is the first step to building meaningful connections with others.

Exploring your preferences

Let's work on identifying and assessing your needs and preferences when it comes to relationships:

1. What **traits** you value in the people you form relationships with.
2. The number of people you share your life with and **how often** you like to see them.
3. What kinds of **activities** do you like to do with them?



Let's take a look at each of these!

1. You gotta trait me well

The first factor is to understand the traits and characteristics that are important to you. Many of us don't really think about this: we meet people and start hanging out with them. But understanding the traits you really like (and dislike) lets you distinguish the people who really add positive value to your life from those that just happen to cross your path.

Little side-note: in this chapter we'll ask about friends/friendships, but the answers you give also apply to other types of relationships!

Take a moment and think: when do you consider someone a good friend?

What other students said:

Willow	For me a friend is someone that wants to spend time with you and you want to spend time with them. Even if you can't hang out on a regular basis, it's important that you still invest in the relationship. For example by calling or staying in touch another way.
Sam	I consider someone a friend when I feel comfortable hanging out with them one on one and being myself. Someone I feel I can trust.
Ruiying	The people who are there for me when I need them, that I can rely on in tough times.

Let's zoom in a bit more: what personality traits make for a good friend?

Tip: picture someone you're close to (current or from the past) and think of what you like most about them. (answer B)

Examples of traits

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trustworthy• Kind• Honest• Loyal• Empathetic• Open / non-judgmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attentive• Generous• Adventurous• Supportive• Fun / humorous
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Personality traits can be interpreted in numerous ways. To make them more concrete, we can describe a trait in terms of the behaviours you like in a friendship.

For each trait, define which behaviour(s) you like to see from others. If you need a bit more inspiration, check out the examples below. (answer C)

Examples of behaviours based on traits

- Trustworthy > they keep their promises
- Kind > they give genuine compliments to others (including me)
- Honest > they tell me if they don't like something (rather than hide it)
- Loyal > they are on my side and want what's best for me
- Empathetic > they understand me and the way I feel
- Open / non-judgmental > I feel like I can fully be myself around them
- Attentive > they're a good listener
- Generous > they're always willing to help me out
- Adventurous > they love trying new things with me
- Supportive > they make time for me when I need them
- Fun / humorous > our sense of humor matches really well



Keep in mind that nobody is perfect and everyone you will ever meet will be a mix of traits or behaviours that you like and that you don't. We're not saying to write someone off the moment you see something you don't like. The goal is to choose the people in our circle purposefully in order to have awesome friendships rather than 'ok' friendships.

That wraps up the first factor in understanding your social needs - let's move on to the next on!



2. Relationship metrics

Second is the number of people you feel you need in your social circle, and how often you want to see them. There are many misconceptions about this topic, and with that some pressure.

It may seem that the 'ideal' social circle is a huge one, with tons of great friends and plans every day. And people with fewer friends or plans might feel like they're doing something 'wrong'. But nothing is further from the truth! How big or active you'd like your social circle to be is personal and there is no right or wrong.

Do you feel any pressure to have a certain number of friends or about how often you're socially active? Explain your answer.

Now park those expectations for a moment and solely think about your own social needs. How many different friends do you think you need in order to have a fulfilled social life? And how often do you want to spend time with friends/partner (how many days a week/month)? These don't need to be exact numbers, of course. (answer D)

We cannot stress enough that all these factors and numbers are very personal and even fluctuate. If you're socially satisfied, don't worry about making more friends or hanging out more. In case you're not satisfied, ask yourself what you would need in order to feel happy with your social life so you can go after it with focus. We'll get back to this a little later in the module too.

3. How do you have fun?

And the last factor is the kind of activities you enjoy taking part doing with your friends.

For example; **Tutku's** favourite thing in the world is playing basketball. She joined a local basketball team and now often hangs out with the eight girls that are on her team to go partying together.

Georgi prefers to stay in with one or two close friends to game and have more personal talks (and have a couple of beers).

Of course these aren't the only activities Tutku and Georgi enjoy, but it does demonstrate that different people have different preferences. If your friends aren't interested in the activities that you enjoy, your social life can feel like it's missing something. In that case, it's important to meet people who enjoy the same things you do and expand your circle of friends.



What do you enjoy or would like to enjoy doing with friends/your partner? List as many activities as you'd like. (answer E)

Are there any activities that you don't do because your friends/partner don't like them? If so, which ones?



Wrapping up your preferences

Take another look at all your answers.

1. These are the personality traits you appreciate: refer to answer B on p. 4

And these are the behaviours you like to see in a friendship: refer to answer C on p. 5

2. This is the number of people you share your life with and how often you'd like to see them: refer to answer D on p. 6

3. And this is what you like to do with others: refer to answer E on p. 7

Now evaluate your current social life based on these needs. Which of your needs are met?

What are you happy with regarding your social life?

Which needs aren't met and what would you like to see differently in order to be happier with your social life?

Keep these things in mind while continuing with this module, perhaps you'll get some inspiration for what to do to improve your social life!

2. Meet people

Now that you know your needs and preferences, a possible next step is to meet new people to create potential friendships (or partners) and meet any unfulfilled needs. This chapter contains practical tips to meet people, but if this isn't something you struggle with you can simply skip it and move on to the chapter 'Strengthen and deepen your relationships'.

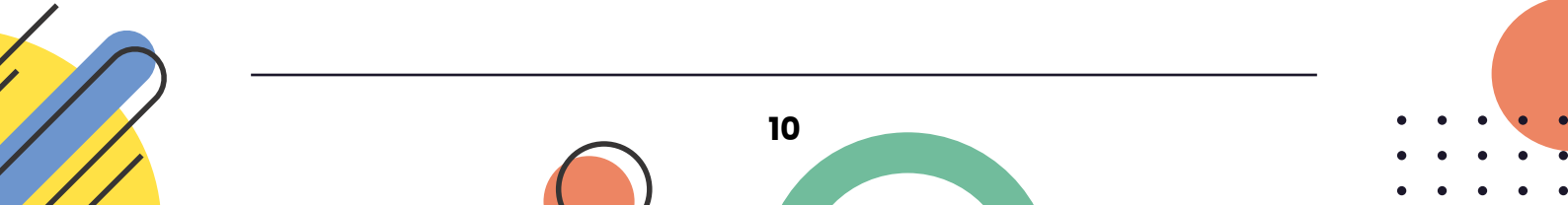
Practical tips to meet new people

- Join group activities such as sports, gym classes, theatre, choir. Pick an activity you like and Google clubs/organisations near you. Many universities also have sports centers you could check out. And then make sure to actually go, of course.
- Every university tends to have an 'event calendar' for students. Check out what kinds of activities are planned and join the ones you find interesting.
- Every university also has several student associations that organise activities. You can:
 - > Look for their programme/event calendar and participate in the activities that are organised by the committees.
 - > Become an active member yourself and help organise activities for other students as part of a team.
- In many studies or courses, students create their own Facebook or WhatsApp group chats. Join these! Oftentimes activities are organised in those groups and you get access to numerous contacts!
- Join the 'One person one day' challenge. This is an initiative organised by a university student where instead of focusing on the number of people you still haven't talked to, you focus on the fact that you can talk to one person every day and make that your daily challenge.
- We highly recommend checking out this [TED-talk](#) about the challenge.



Which of these tips appeal to you and could you put into practice?

Now come up with an action plan. What are the steps that you need to take to meet some new people? Write it down below.



3. Strengthen and deepen your relationships

You've thought about your personal social needs, have possibly come up with ways to meet people and fulfill those needs. So now it's time to deepen your (new) relationships with these three tips!

1. Listen actively

"The greatest problem with communication is we don't listen to understand.

We listen to reply.

When we listen with curiosity, we don't listen with the intent to reply.

We listen for what's behind the words."

- Roy T. Bennett

That guy Bennett got one thing right: most of the time we find ourselves in conversations in which either we are not listening actively because we're waiting to share our own experience, or someone else is not listening to us.


Do you recognize this habit of 'listening to respond' in yourself or in others you interact with? If so, what is the effect?

One of the most valuable things that you can give someone, is your full attention. An **active listener** is curious about the other person in the conversation and is generous with their attention. As a result, the person who is talking feels heard and understood, enjoys their time with you, and will like you much better for it!



How to be an active listener

1. **Face the other person and make eye contact.** A little nonverbal communication such as nodding occasionally also doesn't hurt.
2. **Don't multitask.** Be present and focus on what is going on. So leave that phone in your pocket, pay full attention and have a much better conversation because of it.
3. **Be interested in a person's story.** Ask (open) questions so the other person is encouraged to elaborate, such as:
 - What was that like?
 - How does that affect you?
 - Why do you think or believe that?
 - What will you do next?
4. **Lead with curiosity.** Try to really understand what's going on with the other person, rather than instantly forming (and sharing) your own opinions and judgements.
5. **Take enough time** to explore the other person's experience before jumping in to share your own or switching topics. This is not to say you can't share anything: you definitely should! Having things in common is like glue for people. But the other person shouldn't feel as if their experience was 'glossed over' (remember the quote on page 11).



Think about recent conversations you had with a (potential) friend or partner. Which of the things above did they do, and which ones didn't they? What was the effect of that on you?

What about you: were you listening actively to them? Again: which of the things above did and didn't you do?

How could you improve your active listening skills?

What if you're always the listener already?

Some people talk a lot and some people tend to listen more. Both are fine! In the end what's important is that you both feel like the conversation was rewarding. If you feel that the other person doesn't show interest or listen to you, and that makes you feel bad, then it's time to make some changes.

- You can have an open conversation about it and give feedback. Tell them what behaviour you observed and how that negatively affected you. The optional module 'Express yourself & saying 'no'' offers help with that!
- Own your own part: if we're constantly asking questions and never volunteering any information about ourselves, no wonder the other person keeps talking! Take a good look in the mirror and see what it is that you can do differently.
- Re-evaluate whether this relationship is worth keeping. Sometimes, we keep people in our lives because of external pressure - and we really don't have to!

2. The power of vulnerability

Vulnerability in its most basic form means ‘being at risk of being hurt’. In some contexts, this is obviously not a good thing. In relationships however, it means that you let down your barriers, are open about your thoughts and feelings, and that you show people who you really are.

Being vulnerable is difficult because it puts us in a “dangerous” situation: it increases the chances of us getting hurt by the other person’s reactions. For example, they could judge or reject us.

And that’s exactly what makes vulnerability so powerful! You show the other person that you trust them with your honest self and that they can be honest back. And when the other person responds positively you feel accepted and the bond deepens immensely.



So while it’s not comfortable, it is one of the most effective ways to create meaningful relationships.

The School of Life has a great video about vulnerability in friendships. If you’re interested in this topic, [click here](#) to check it out.

To what extent are you vulnerable with the people you're close to?

Remember: it's about letting down your barriers, being open about your thoughts and feelings, and showing people who you really are. You're not really vulnerable unless you feel somewhat uncomfortable, because being vulnerable means facing the risk of some sort of social rejection.

On a scale of 0 to 10, how vulnerable are you with your close relationships?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
0: not at all **10: very**

Explain your rating:

How can you be vulnerable?

Vulnerability can take many forms. Below are some examples of how some students chose to be vulnerable.

Tom

Tom and Sergio recently met and started hanging out more and more. Tom's been thinking how happy he is to have made such a good friend, but feels awkward saying it out loud. Courageously, Tom tells Sergio that he really appreciates his company and that he is very grateful to have him as a friend. Since then Tom and Sergio feel closer to each other.



Sabrina

Sabrina has been having a difficult time: uni has been very demanding and she often feels anxious. When her classmate Emilio asks how she's doing, her first thought is 'He doesn't want to hear about my worries'. But knowing how nice it would be to talk to someone, she confides in him. To her surprise, Emilio is also struggling with the workload and suggests they study together. Now they know they can count on each other for support.

Mick

Mick recently met and befriended Joel at the gym, and they started working out together sometimes. They get along great, but Joel is always late when they make plans. Mick has been getting really annoyed about it. While he's scared of angering Joel and jeopardizing the friendship by criticizing him, he still decides to be open about how he feels. Joel understands completely, owns up to his actions and starts being on time. Mick has learned that he can share his thoughts openly and that Joel will respond positively, and they have a much more honest friendship.

Think of the relationships you'd like to see deepened. How could you be more vulnerable with those friends? Perhaps you've held back certain thoughts or feelings, or tend to act differently to how you really feel sometimes.

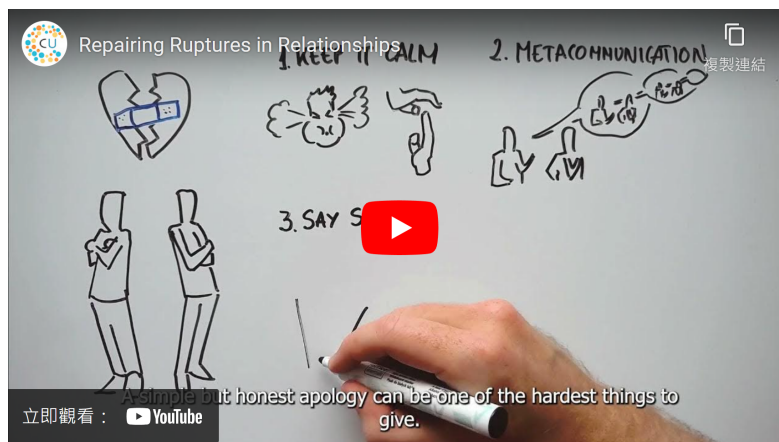
Write down how you could be more vulnerable with them. Try to make it concrete (what, who, when):

Don't forget to follow through and actually do the things you've written above!

3. Mending and repairs

Every relationship (friendly, romantic, family) goes through tough moments that may shake the comfort, trust and safety of the relationship. However, what makes a difference is the ability to talk about those things and work on repairing those ruptures.


Watch this video to hear some tips on how to do repairs ([The video transcript is available on p.20](#)):



You've seen 4 ways to mend relationships:

1. Talk when you're both calm.
2. Practice metacommunication.
3. Say 'I'm sorry'.
4. Talk about the way forward.

Think of a situation from the past in which one of your own friends- or relationships needed mending. Perhaps you had a fight, or the trust was broken somehow.



Were you able to mend this relationship? If so, how did that happen, what did you both do?

How could you have implemented the tips above to make the repairs easier or better?

The next 2 questions are about a relationship that currently needs repairs. This doesn't necessarily need to be big fight, it can also be a smaller thing. If you don't have a relationship that needs mending, feel free to skip to the next page!

Use the tips above to come up with an action plan for how to fix things. What can you do exactly?

The last step is always to actually implement your plans. So set a time and date now for the steps you've written above (and make sure you follow through!):

Hack wrap-up



You made it all the way to the end, awesome!

Now let's take a look back at what you said at the beginning of this module.

This is what you wanted to achieve with regards to your social life/relationships:

Refer to answer A on p.2.

How will you move forward with this goal, using the tips from this module?

This module in bullets:

- Relationships are a need that all human beings have.
- What fulfills that need is unique for every individual; from your friends' characteristics, the number of friends and how often you hang out, and the type of activities you do together.
- To meet new people there are many resources that you can use. Check out your uni's events calendar or join a student association, for example.
- Deepening friendships requires vulnerability, active listening and repairs when needed.

Optional mood-related modules unlocked!



We recommend continuing with the ones that are relevant for you straight away and keep the momentum going!

Express yourself & say 'no' - learn how to speak up when you'd rather stay quiet

Overcome social anxiety - a 3-step process to manage and deal with negative feelings about social situations

What did you think of this module? Please let us know your views [here](#).

Supplementary information



Video transcript of Repairing Ruptures in Relationships

Whether it's family, friends or romantic partners, all relationships experience moments of rupture. Here are 4 tips you can use to repair these ruptures in your relationships.

1. **Start when calm and take a break if needed.** It's usually not productive to have a conversation when either party feels full of negative emotion. So make sure you're both calm when you start the conversation. And if things get heated, say "Hey, let's take a break to cool down and then discuss things more gently". Just make sure you set a follow-up time/date!
2. **Practice metacommunication.** This is talking about the way the conversation is going, rather than talking about the topic itself. Metacommunication can be extremely helpful when the talk becomes unproductive. Make sure you stick to what you can see and know for sure, such as the other person's behaviour, rather than throw assumptions around. Some examples of meta-communication:
 - I notice we're both raising our voice, which doesn't help. Shall we return to a regular volume?
 - You've become very quiet, is there something I can do to encourage you to speak up?
 - When I ask you a question, you often ask a question back instead of answering. This makes me feel like this conversation isn't moving forward.
3. **Say "I'm sorry".** A simple but honest apology can be one of the hardest things to give. The idea of admitting that we did wrong or hurt someone can be difficult because it shows that we might not be all that good. However, showing that you acknowledge the impact of your behaviour on the other is a strong sign that you care and are willing to learn.
4. **Talk about the way forward.** In any relationship, mistakes will be made and there's plenty to learn. Discuss what you both can do better next time, and make sure you both stick to these plans.