

## Healthy Supports

Healthy supports are people who provide you with practical or emotional support. Healthy supports are a basic human need. The Biopsychosocial Spiritual Model (see section on Understanding Pain) states that social connection is key to our health and personal growth.



Created by Lakshisha  
from Noun Project

Social connection requires having good relationships with people in your environment. It can be many people or only a few.

It can also include pets.

Social connection and healthy supports have many benefits, including:

- Emotional support and caring
- Healthy physical growth
- Help with daily activities
- Resilience building

You have probably met people who are both supportive, and unsupportive. Being clear on what you are looking for in others can be helpful as you develop social connections and healthy supports.

On the right is a list of supportive and unsupportive traits that you might notice in other people.

### Supportive traits

- Asks what you need
- Encourages you to look after yourself
- Follows through with plans
- Provides accountability
- Acts positive and uplifting
- Motivates and energizes you
- Listens without judgment
- Shows interest in you and your well being
- Believes your experiences
- Accepts you and your boundaries
- Acts trustworthy and honestly

### Unsupportive traits

- Negatively affects your emotional or physical health
- Lacks empathy, for example, says “Get over it”
- Agrees to do something but does not do it
- Ignores or oversteps boundaries
- Tells you what to do
- Acts or speaks critically, or judges or blames other people
- Does not believe you
- Yells or says things that make you feel bad about yourself
- Makes you feel exhausted after being with them
- Does not accept responsibility for their own actions
- Says they will do something, but does not do it
- Says things that are not true, and you cannot trust them

The following can help build your healthy supports:

- knowing which traits are most important to you
- strengthening and building the supports you already have
- finding ways to meet new supportive people
- communicating effectively



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List one or more people in your life who are already healthy supports. Then list at least one way you could acknowledge or strengthen this relationship in the next 2 weeks.

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If you do not feel you have someone already in your life who is a healthy support, what actions can you take in the next 2 weeks to begin to connect with supportive people?

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## Communication

Communication means an exchange of information between people through common symbols, signs, or behaviour.

Chronic pain can affect the supportive relationships you have. It can also affect how you communicate with the people around you.

When you have chronic pain, difficulties with communication can include:

- Being distracted by the pain or not feeling present.
- Feeling irritable and feeling that people are not listening or understanding you.
- Feeling as if people do not believe you. This might lead to withdrawal.
- Feeling like a burden to others. This might lead to not asking for help.
- Having impulsive thoughts and emotions and regretting them later.
- Feeling ignored or that people are tired of hearing about your pain. This might lead to not expressing yourself.
- Assuming that people should be able to read your mind and know what you want, think or need.
- Finding it difficult to explain you needs or what you want to say.

When you do not express how you feel emotionally, you might:

- Feel misunderstood.
- Feel as if your needs are not being met.
- Have your feeling hurt.
- Have increased physical pain.
- Have negative emotions.



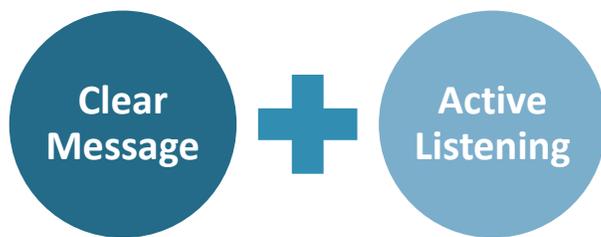
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## Effective communication

Effective communication is a learned skill. It can help you have deeper connections with other people. It can also improve your emotional and social wellbeing.

Effective communication means understanding the meaning and emotion from the information you are given. It occurs when both people understand each other.

Effective communication has two main parts:



There are three skills used in effective communication.

### Skill #1 Assertiveness

- Say what you want, think, and feel, clearly and calmly. Speak in an authentic and open way that shows respect.
- Know what you are saying before you speak. Be decisive.
- Use statements that start with “I” to turn negative thoughts into positive feelings. For example, “I love it when you help me make dinner”, versus, “You never make dinner with me”.
- Be specific with what you want to get out of the exchange. Do you want support, or advice?

### Traits of assertiveness

- Clear
- Good eye contact
- Confident body language
- Appropriate speaking volume
- Steady tone of voice
- Appropriate hand gestures and posture



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### Skill #2 Active listening

Active listening helps you understand the meaning and emotion behind what is said. It makes the other person feel heard, understood, and accepted. This can make your relationship stronger.

### Traits of active listening

- Be present and give all your attention to the speaker
- Try not to interrupt
- Be curious and interested in what is being said
- Avoid judging the speaker or what is being said
- Use your own words to repeat what the person said and say it back to them. Ask questions to clarify if needed.

### Skill #3 Boundary setting

Setting boundaries can be a helpful tool for communicating your needs. It can also help your self-confidence and protect your physical and mental wellbeing.

You can use this helpful formula to help you set boundaries assertively.

#### Boundary Setting Formula

1. I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe emotion)
2. When you \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe person's behaviour or situation)
3. Because \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe the effect of you experiencing that)
4. Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?  
(Make your request)

Example:

**"I feel** upset and frustrated,  
**When you** call me at 11pm at night,  
**Because** my sleep is interrupted, and that increases my pain.  
**Would you be willing to** call me before 8pm instead?"

### Tips for communicating pain

Understand your chronic pain and how it affects you. This will help you clearly explain it to friends, family and other people.

Show people your self-management worksheets, learning modules, and videos instead of having to explain it to them. You might want to practice together.

- Agree how and when you will indicate your pain is bad, before you have pain.
- Try a non-verbal communication system, like a smiley face system on your refrigerator, to avoid repeating conversations.
- Choose a comfortable place and pick a good time, such as when you feel well, for important conversations.
- Try doing relaxation and breathing techniques before you have to communicate important things.
- Set limits on how long you can actively participate in a conversation.

**What stood out to me in this section?**

**Questions I still have on this topic**

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## Resources

### Websites to find supports



#### [Pain BC - Support and Wellness Groups](#)

Connect with a group of people living with pain and build a community of support while learning about pain. Groups are free of cost and meet twice a month.

#### [Pain BC - Support Line](#)

Speak to someone about your pain, or the pain of someone you care for. Get free information and support.



### Websites on communicating with healthcare providers



#### [Assert Yourself](#)

Learn to be assertive when you communicate by completing the 10 modules in this workbook.

#### [Pain BC - Effective Communication Tips for People in Pain](#)

Read a short article with tips for communicating with health care providers, family and friends.



#### [Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute – Pain U Online](#)

Learn from modules on communication with healthcare providers, friends, family, and at work.

#### [Help Guide – Effective Communication](#)

Read article outlining effective communication skills and strategies.

