

DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

The Surprising Power of Your Social Circle



Believe it or not, who you hangout and even just speak with may say more about you than you realize.

Social circles significantly impact our health and well-being by influencing our habits & interests, providing emotional support, and affecting our physical and mental health. But this doesn't just apply to our friends, this also includes our acquaintances, family members, colleagues and pretty much anyone else we socialize with. To totally understand how all of these people impact our lives we first need to talk about social ties and social capital.

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Social Ties and Social Capital

What is a social tie? Social ties are defined as connections between two or more people that is used for sharing information, knowledge, feelings and experiences. There are three notable social ties that we all experience, they are; 1) strong, 2) weak, and 3) invisible.

Strong social ties are the close relationships we have with family, close friends and intimate partners. It is characterized by frequently spending time together, liking each other, sharing feelings of emotional closeness, and having shared history and experiences, as well as being familiar with each others social circles. Just existing with these people feels good and we enjoy it.

Weak social ties are casual, infrequent relationships and connections. This would include the cashier at the grocery store, co-workers you don't really know or someone you recognize and maybe know their name but barely speak with. There is significantly less emotional intensity within these relationships then with someone who we have a strong tie with and we infrequently interact with these people. Their role in our lives may seem small, maybe insignificant, but their impact is huge! (We'll explore this later).



And finally, invisible ties. These are social ties that are so minimal we often overlook them and might not even recognize they happen. An example of this is the 'nodding' relationship, this is literally the relationship you have with someone when you nod at them while walking by. We acknowledge their existence and that's about it. Believe it or not, these interactions impact us and hold value.

All of these social ties and interactions combine to create our social capital. Which are the multiple relationship networks we gain value from and have within our community. Allowing our society to function through trust, cooperation and shared norms.

In other words, having a high social capital is associated with having a

Did You Know?

A study completed in 2023 by the University of Washington estimated the average North American knows 611 people!

diverse range of relationships and social ties. Having low social capital is having less relationships and associated with more isolation.

The Importance of Relationships

Now you know about social ties and social capital, why is it important?

The biggest reason is health. All social ties are valuable and have drastic impacts on our health and wellbeing. All types of healthy relationships are associated with lowering of illness such as heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression and dementia. However, the stronger the social tie the more preventative it is in mitigating negative health outcomes. One study showed that isolation and loneliness increased the chances of premature death by 26%-29% respectfully. Another reported that loneliness can impact a persons health the same way smoking 20 cigarettes per day can!

A review of 38 studies found that adult friendships, especially high-quality ones that provide social support and companionship, consistently predict well-being and can protect against mental health issues such as depression and anxiety —and those benefits persist across someone's lifespan.



Interestingly, these strong social ties also impact how our brain functions. Scientists studying friendship have even found similar brain activity among friends in brain regions responsible for a range of functions, including motivation, reward, identity, and sensory processing. We become more similar to the people we spend more time with. We also tend to befriend and become close with people who are already similar to us. This study took it a step further and made predictions on who would become friends in a Dartmouth University MBA program after measuring incoming students neural patterns. Guess what! They were right! Based on their findings they were able to predict who would become friends based on pre-existing neural compatibility and found that the more similar they were the closer the friendship.

On the flip side, weak ties are almost just as important for different reasons.

Weak social ties are proven to fortify our life satisfaction and can often make us feel like we are part of a larger community. They also allow us to network outside our own social circle and gather information or ideas that we may not have otherwise gotten. Interestingly, the importance of weak social ties goes back to our hunter-gather days. Historically weak social ties helped humans survive by letting us share information about what was dangerous, where the best hunting was, news from neighbouring groups but also allowed us reproductive success because we were able to widen our gene pool to people outside our own social circle (which we still do). The groups that had the 'strongest' weak ties were the most likely to survive, and overtime the need for weak social became part of our nature.

Invisible social ties, also called 'nodding relationships' as mentioned previously, are foundational. Acknowledging someone is often the first way we start any kind of relationship. The invisible tie is the base which every other relationship is built on. Even if the relationship doesn't develop into anything other than a 'nod' these relationships hold a lot of value.



When we 'nod' at someone we determine how we feel about that person. We essentially judge them to decide if this person is friendly, dangerous, unwell, interested in us in anyway and gather any immediate information that might be useful to us. They also help us enforce broader social and cultural norms within society such as fashion trends, acceptable behaviour or the feeling and energy in an environment. Humans are always looking to belong and be accepted. Invisible social ties help us observe and further understand how to do this by imitating the people around us in our own ways so we can be part of the larger community.

What Do Your Relationships Say About You?

Who you willing spend your time with says a lot about you. You may even say these people represent you.



Your friends and romantic partners in particular show your values, interests, social status, personality type, attachment style, priorities and in some cases give insight into our own self-perception and self-worth.

‘Birds on a feather flock together’ is a saying for a reason. Who we choose to spend time reflects who we are because we wouldn’t be spending time with these people if we didn’t like them or if we had nothing in common. Friend groups also create their own ‘norms’ and expectations that influence our behaviour and tell us what is acceptable. In some circles, birthdays mean big celebrations, group chats planning surprises, and thoughtful gifts. In others, a simple “happy birthday” text is more than enough. Those differences don’t determine the quality of a friendship; they reveal what each group sees as meaningful connection.

Our relationships also say a lot about how we regard ourselves based on how we let others treat us. If others respect us we tend to respect ourselves because we learn that’s the appropriate way to be treated and we typically won’t settle for less. However, if we lack boundaries, and accept being put down or used this reflects in our self worth as we internalize these messages. We begin to feel that this is normal and the way we deserve to be treated.



Ultimately, your relationships act like mirrors—reflecting not only who you are, but also who you believe you’re allowed to be. The people you keep close can reinforce your strengths, values, and confidence, or they can chip away at them over time. Noticing what your relationships say about you isn’t about judgment; it’s an invitation to get curious. When you understand how these connections shape you, you gain the power to choose relationships that support the life and version of yourself you want to grow into.

Tools to Help You Get it All Done: The Holiday Calendar

No matter what you're celebrating, December tends to be one of the busiest months of the year. As a therapist, it's also one of my busiest seasons. I often hear people share how overwhelmed they feel: "I have too much to do and not enough time," "I overbooked myself," "I'm exhausted," "I don't even know where to start."

If you can relate, you're not alone. That's exactly why I created The Holiday Calendar—a simple tool to help you organize what needs to get done, pace yourself, and even carve out time to rest. Just follow the steps below.

What you need:

- 1-2 pieces of paper *or* your scheduler
- a pen
- Optional: fun coloured markers/pens

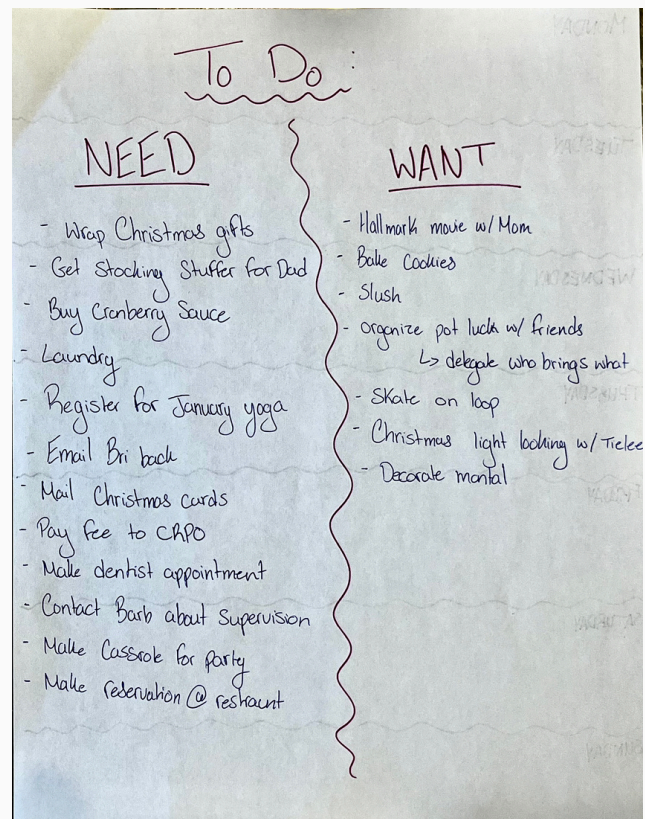
Step 1:

On your first piece of paper, draw a line down the middle.

- On the left side, write down everything you need to do this season.
- On the right side, write down everything you want to do.

As you fill it in, you might notice that the need-to-do's outweigh the want-to-do's—and that's completely normal. You may also find a few tasks that fit into both categories. Those items often matter the most: they're meaningful and necessary.

(See the photo example for what Step 1 looks like when it's complete.)



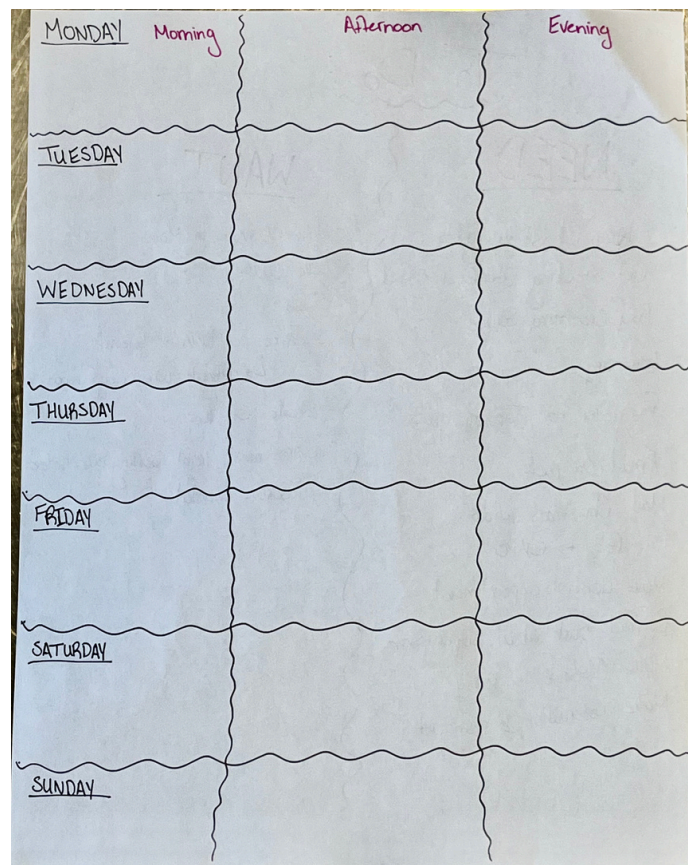
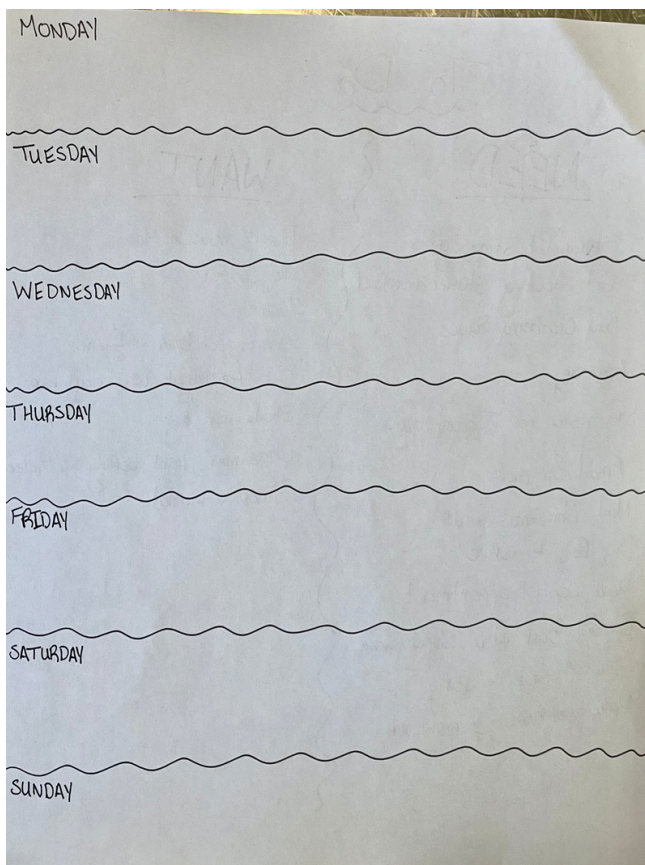
Step 2:

On your second sheet of paper (or on the back of your list), draw seven evenly spaced horizontal sections. These will represent the seven days of the week. At the top of each section, write the day of the week, leaving plenty of room underneath for writing. If you're using a scheduler, this part is already set up for you.

Next, divide each day into three columns:

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening

If you find you need more space, feel free to add extra columns. For example, early risers might include an early morning section for tasks they do before getting ready for work.



Step 3:

Now, take the items from your “need to do” and “want to do” lists and begin placing them into your weekly layout. As you do this, keep a few things in mind:

- Consider the time each task will actually take—including travel time, if needed.
- Then assume it will take longer than you think. Life rarely goes exactly as planned, and giving yourself extra time helps reduce stress and overwhelm.

Don't forget to schedule non-negotiables that might not be on your list, like work, school, appointments, family responsibilities, or regular activities. Adding these helps you see how much time you really have to work with.

You may notice in my example that some tasks (like laundry) appear more than once. Breaking bigger tasks into smaller chunks makes them easier to complete, without feeling rushed or stressed.

I've also highlighted self-care and downtime on my calendar. For me, these are non-negotiables—I protect them with strong boundaries. I don't schedule anything over them, and I treat that time as space to do whatever I need or want. I encourage you to do the same if possible; rest is not a luxury, it's part of how you manage everything else.

Quick Side Note:

The Holiday Calendar should work for you. Its purpose is to break your week into manageable pieces so your to-do list feels less overwhelming.

Feel free to adjust it: add extra columns, skip days you don't want to schedule, or plan only part of the week at a time. If your version supports your life and reduces stress, then it's working.

Hot Tip:

Downtime or free time does not necessarily mean available time.

Just because you have time with nothing planned doesn't mean you need to fill that time with something. Sometimes the plan is to have nothing planned.

This is an act of self care.

<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon</u>	<u>Evening</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Put on Laundry<ul style="list-style-type: none">↳ Folding- Clean bathroom works 12:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Email Bri back- Contact Barb about supervision- Register for Jan. Yoga 5:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Decorate mantel 7pm onward Down Time	
<u>TUESDAY</u>	Gym @ 7:00am work @ 9:00am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pay fee to CRPO- Make Dentist appt. 4:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Put on Laundry- Hallmark movie w/ mom Running @ 6:30pm
<u>WEDNESDAY</u>	work 9:00am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Make reservation @ restaurant 4:00pm	Down Time
<u>THURSDAY</u>	Meeting @ 10:00am-12:00pm work 7AM → 2:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supermarket<ul style="list-style-type: none">↳ buy cranberry sauce↳ ingredients for cookies- Get stocking stuffers for Dad Meeting @ 1:00-2:00	Down Time
<u>FRIDAY</u>	Gym @ 7:00 AM work @ 9:00am	4:00pm	- Skate on Loop
<u>SATURDAY</u>	Running @ 9:00 AM Bake cookies	Make Casserole Wrap Christmas gifts	- Christmas Light ladder <ul style="list-style-type: none">↳ supper out
<u>SUNDAY</u>	Yoga Wrap Christmas gifts	Down Time	- Pot luck w/ friends

Updates, This & That

Align Chiropractic and Wellness Food Drive

Clients that would like to donate non-perishable food items can do so throughout the month of December. To donate place your item under the tree. All proceeds go to the Community Food Sharing Association. The last day to Donate is December 22nd.

Christmas Clinic Closure.

The clinic will be closed December 24th until December 27th & January 31st 2025 as well as January 1st, 2026.

Footwear Reminder

A reminder to all clients to change your outdoor shoes to our indoor sandals which can be found in the clinic waiting area. We ask that all clients do this to help reduce the amount of road salt stains and water marks appear on our clinic flooring during the winter months. Thank you for helping us keep our workspace clean!

Pet of the Month

Please meet Franklin, Dr. Ashley's newest buddy!

Thanks for the visit Franklin!



New Service Announcement!

Dr. Sam Windsor is now offering acupuncture at the clinic! Book your first session today!

