



## Chapter 40 Gather

Getting together with friends, neighbors, family, a team or a group of coworkers, that's what keeps us healthy. In the previous chapter, I describe the critical importance of social interactions to our health. That's just what we need.

### Research

Sharing is on the list of the three paths to being happy, according to Arthur Brooks (2022). The first path is having knowledge about what makes us happy, the second path is practicing what

makes us happy and the third path is sharing our happiness. Gathering with others is an opportunity to share our happiness. The gathering could be chatting at the end of the driveway

with your neighbor, talking for a few minutes before class with your peers or taking time to have coffee with a friend.

I taught a graduate online course where I titled an online section 'let's have coffee.' In the virtual section, without the teacher being present, students could click in to get together and compare notes, ask questions about the course and offer each other encouragement. The link allowed students from around the world to mimic the in-person experience of seeing and learning from each other. The 'let's have coffee' was a way to gather *and* a way for me to decentralize authority so the students could find resources amongst themselves. As I explained to the

students, by sharing concerns you recognize that there are others with the same question. You are not alone grappling with the course material, the course expectations or, for that matter, my way of teaching. The approach worked well. I would come in when I was invited, learn how to improve the course from the student questions and I found out that there were so many experts in the virtual room! Gathering facilitated new connections and new learning. We all benefited.

Gathering gives us an opportunity to be together with old friends and form new relationships.

"Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation," Vaillant (2002) commented in an eighty-year study on aging.

"Loneliness kills. It's as powerful as smoking or alcoholism," says Dr. George Vaillant, a world-

renowned expert on the effects of alcohol (2002). Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, Dr. Vaillant's study revealed.

Those ties protect people from life's stresses help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes.

"When the study began, nobody cared about empathy or attachment," observed Vaillant.

"But

the key to healthy aging (whether you are 22 or 82) is relationships, relationships, relationships" (2002). <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>

### Relax

Let's sit quietly and gather ourselves first. In our busy lives, by being pulled in this direction and that direction we can feel dismembered, pulled apart. Finding a quiet time to settle down, remember who we are and what's important to us, that's what we need right now. Just a brief reflection can bring us back to ourselves. Let's do that. Sit, breathe and quiet down. Bring yourself back home by coming inside for a few minutes. Reflecting on all you have done today or plan to do, appreciate what you are able to do, feel success, even just a tiny success, let yourself feel the good and then let it go.

### Write

Take five minutes to write about a gathering with friends, family, a team or even strangers, whatever comes to mind. Write the story of who you were with, what you were doing, what it was like and how you felt. Describe enough that the reader can feel the vibe of the gathering.

Sample: "I was in a training/meeting with a group of colleagues at all different levels, but one

common theme was supporting intellectually challenged individuals from 21 to 66 years of age. We were chatting about a lot of different scenarios. Each one was very informative and educational and all of us had perspectives on how best to facilitate meaningful engagements for adults who had developmentally disabilities. We talked about a lot of different experiences and opportunities. I loved hearing about adults, who think or act differently, making connections with other families and with coworkers delivering meals on wheels. Such heartwarming stories.

The smiles, laughs and sounds were so uplifting." (2022)

### Reflect

Now that you know the health benefits of gathering with one other person or several people, look for this opportunity during your week. Create a gathering yourself or enjoy a spontaneous get together.