



**CELEBRATING THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF  
BELONGING, GRATITUDE  
AND TOGETHERNESS**

NOVEMBER TOOLKIT





# Gathering strength through **connection**

Human connection isn't just a feel-good concept; it's a biological necessity. From lowering stress to boosting immunity, the benefits of coming together ripple through every aspect of well-being. This month, as the year winds down and the days grow shorter, we invite you to explore the healing power of community, shared experiences and emotional bonds.

Whether you're gathering around a table, joining a Thrive program or simply texting someone you care about, connection is a powerful tool for growth. While Thanksgiving is one way to celebrate gratitude, this toolkit embraces all traditions, including starting a new tradition of your own. The heart of this season isn't a single holiday; it's rooted in the practice of showing up for each other and for ourselves.







# The harvest of **belonging**

Social wellness refers to the quality of our relationships and our ability to connect with others in meaningful ways. It's a vital dimension of health that influences everything from mood to longevity.

Community is a free and accessible health asset. Meaningful relationships and shared experiences offer powerful mental, physical and behavioral benefits.

On the mental health front, connection helps reduce stress, anxiety and feelings of isolation while building emotional resilience and a stronger sense of self-worth.

In terms of physical benefits, people with strong social ties tend to have lower risks of heart disease and stroke, along with enhanced immune function and reduced inflammation.

Behaviorally, community support encourages healthier habits, greater accountability and faster recovery from illness or injury. On a broader level, thriving communities foster trust, safety and mutual aid while promoting equity and access to care.

Whether it's a conversation, a shared meal or a group walk, every moment of connection contributes to a healthier, more supported life.

# Fall into friendship:

## Everyday ways to build belonging

Just like including more whole foods in your diet or starting a fitness program, building strong social ties is a gradual, intentional process. It starts with small, meaningful actions:

1.

### Make time for togetherness.

Schedule regular check-ins with friends or family. If you're a state employee, enjoy the activities offered by Thrive programs, like game night, bowling or a gratitude walk. Even just a five-minute chat can make a difference!

3.

### Listen and reflect.

Practice active listening. Ask open-ended questions. Explore your relationships and deepen your emotional presence with others.

2.

### Practice gratitude daily.

Write a thank-you note. Send a voice message. Share a compliment. Gratitude is more than a holiday – it's a mindset.



# Fall into friendship:

## Everyday ways to build belonging



4.

### **Celebrate traditions – or create new ones.**

Host a Friendsgiving, a "Harvest of Kindness" potluck or a gratitude gathering this month. If Thanksgiving isn't part of your tradition, consider a "Reflection Dinner" or a "Season of Thanks" journaling challenge.



5.

### **Engage in shared activities.**

Cook a meal together, take a hike or volunteer as a group.



**Activity idea:** Try making a connection playlist. Create a playlist on your preferred music streaming service, add some songs that lift your spirits and invite your social group to do the same!



# The ripple effect of **community care**

Connection creates measurable health ripples felt by all. Social support helps regulate cortisol levels, reducing stress and improving mood. Positive relationships also strengthen the immune system by boosting immune response and reducing inflammation. Feeling safe and supported enhances sleep quality and accelerates physical recovery. People with strong social ties tend to live longer, have healthier lives and experience better cognitive function, as social engagement protects against decline and dementia.

Belonging also promotes healthy habits. Group accountability can support nutrition, fitness and self-care goals. Perhaps most importantly, connection builds resilience and purpose. It fosters hope, motivation and a sense of being part of something larger than oneself. In short, togetherness isn't just a seasonal theme – it's a year-round strategy for thriving.





# Gratitude around the table and beyond

Thanksgiving is one way to celebrate gratitude and togetherness, but it's not the only way. This season is about honoring what brings us together.

Activities like sharing a meal, writing a heartfelt note or taking a quiet moment of reflection help us feel grounded and supported. However you celebrate, this season is a chance to reconnect – with yourself, with others and with what matters most to you.





# Bingo for belonging:

## How many can you complete?

To make this season of connection even more engaging, we've added a Community, Gathering and Gratitude Bingo sheet to your toolkit. Each square invites you to take a small, meaningful action, such as checking in with a friend, sharing a meal or reflecting on something you're grateful for. It's a playful way to turn intention into impact and celebrate the everyday moments that build belonging.

See how many you can complete throughout November and challenge a co-worker or loved one to join you. Let's make connection contagious!

**Play bingo** ➡





# BINGO

*for belonging*

Listen to a song that reminds you of someone you appreciate

Create a "Season of Thanks" calendar

Post an encouraging message in a group chat or community forum

Help set up or clean up at a group gathering

Write a thank-you note or email

Play a game with family, friends or co-workers

Leave a kind note or message in a public space

Start a shared gratitude jar in your home or at work

Take a photo of something that makes you feel grateful and share it with someone

Join a potluck or make plans to host one

Send a check-in text to a friend you haven't talked to in a while

Learn about a tradition or holiday that's different from your own

**FREE SPACE!**

Share something with others, such as your favorite recipe or a playlist

Introduce yourself to someone new

Share a story or memory that made you feel connected to someone

Volunteer or donate to a local cause

Create a "comfort list" of things that help you feel safe, calm or joyful

Give someone a sincere compliment

Ask someone about their favorite fall tradition or holiday memory

Participate in a group activity

Invite someone to join you for coffee

Make a list of your strengths and how you've used them this year

Share something you're grateful for in a group setting

Say no to something that drains you – and say yes to something that fulfills you