Social connectivity in a time of crisis

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Agenda

- The importance of social connections

- Research @ Jisc

- Strategies and structures

- Plenary and discussion

- *Please use the chat function, post questions, share ideas, and talk to each other.*

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Thanks

- Tania Usherwood-Pye, University of Nottingham

- Ken Bauer Favel, Tecnológico de Monterrey

- Donna Lanclos, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

- Jisc R&D team

- All our research participants.

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What do we mean by "social connectivity"

Social connection encompasses the relationships, networks or links that people have with other people or groups, whether these be with neighbours, family, friends, sporting or social groups.

"Social connection" is about the "people we know; the friends we confide in, the family we belong to and the community we live in"

Wilkinson, A. et al (2019). Maintenance and Development of Social Connection by People with Long-term Conditions: A Qualitative Study. Int J Environ Res Public Health.

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Disruption / interruption

But actually…

- Anyone can become socially isolated – its not just about the pandemic.

- For some people, a mix of complex circumstances makes social isolation a lifelong experience.

- For others, a key life event can lead to diminished social interaction.

- Also social and structural barriers contribute to social exclusion.

- The degree of impact from social isolation is linked to the resources that people have available to cope with change.

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Other than the current situation… what examples of social isolation have you seen in your students?

Please type in the chat box

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http://codesign.jiscinvolve.org

In the first six weeks

"In the old world you could just knock on an administrator's door, now you have to email."

Some students have embraced technology to communicate with staff, some students haven't felt the need and are "just getting on with things".

"There are quite a lot of colleagues I haven't had contact with for weeks. Maybe one or two emails"

"There's just that sense of not knowing how people are doing because you're not in contact with them"

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As time went on

At first we said, "Oh, we must have, you know, coffee, virtual coffee mornings and things like that." But it hasn't happened.

"A couple of colleagues made an attempt to try to get conversations going on teams, including posting pet photographs and things like that. But very few people took part."

"I think that the reaction in general in the college has just been, you know, batten down the hatches and just do what you can."

I think that's typical of us as a college, you know, neglecting that social side of things. It's always been a problem and it's now a bigger problem."

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Toward the end of 2020

"There are colleagues I haven't heard from, particularly those with young children, I am concerned about how they are doing."

"We need to be able to talk more informally and be able to sort things instead of having 10 emails, I need to be able to just have a conversation"

"I'm really glad to be taking part in the research, I live alone and I haven't had a proper, you know with voices, conversation in over a month"

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So, what can we do?

Strategies and structures: Six questions to inform them

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What do people need?

- Group interests and meaningful activities

- Balance task and social interaction

- Culture of caring and trust

- Think about difference

- Manage expectations

- Widen the team communications

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What physical environment are people in?

- What are their immediate surroundings?

- Going forward, some might be remote, some not.

- Do they have the right equipment?

- Can you meet up? (fulfilling Govt guidelines)

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Who's at risk?

- It is important to know the indicators that someone is experiencing, or at risk of, isolation and loneliness, such as:
    - reductions in participation or withdrawal from activities
    - reduced social contact
    - reduced confidence
    - inability to access usual coping skills following a crisis
    - lack of availability of support from friends, family and the community

- Consider initiatives to contact isolated people

- Check with HR!

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What are the specific barriers?

- How does your team like to engage?
    - What things are happening that might be preventing people engaging?
    - Time?
    - Access to tools or network?
    - Other commitments?
- Are the activities in place fully inclusive?

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What leadership behaviours are you seeing?

- Social connectivity must be present at all levels.
  - Leaders need to model the social connectivity behaviours they want to see in their staff.

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What can you do to reinforce existing social connectivity?

- Identify and strengthen those factors that are already in place.

- Don't replace things that are working.

- When we emerge from "now" what practices and "spaces" do you want to continue to promote?

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The Six Social Connectivity Questions

1. What do people need?
2. What physical environment are people in?
3. Who's at risk?
4. What are the specific barriers?
5. What leadership behaviours are you seeing?
6. What can you do to reinforce existing social connectivity?

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Most of what we have covered today is common sense. We know instinctively that social connectivity is key to our resilience during the current difficult time; many have also reported that how we connect in a social way helps maintain our "productivity".

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Plenary and Discussion

Your ideas, questions, and comments

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Thank you for participating today

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