

# BLUE ZONES

“When you are young and healthy, it never occurs to you that in a single second your whole life could change.” ~ Annette Funicello

## Connection lost and found



Social connection has been shown to lower rates of anxiety and depression, improve self-esteem, help strengthen our immune system and may even help us to live longer. GETTY IMAGES

### Sebastien Saitta

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It is no secret that maintaining social connection is one of the most important things we can do to maintain physical and emotional well-being. In fact, a landmark study published in the American Association for the Advancement of Science showed that lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure.

On the other hand, social connection has shown to lower rates of anxiety and depression, improve self-esteem, help strengthen our immune system and may even help us to live longer. It is no wonder why we long to connect with one another.

Unfortunately, these days connection has been lost for so many. For the sake of safety and protection, we have been thrust into an environment where close contact and connection is awkwardly avoided, and if there is any, it's usually only with our closest loved ones at home. A YouGov poll in August states that 31 percent of people report that it has been more than four months since they hugged someone who doesn't live in their home.

Whether it's the our new remote work environment, or not being able to join our friends for a wine at 5 o'clock, or even being separated from the cashier at the check-out line by clear plastic, we can't help but feel a little less connected these days.

Fortunately, our biological programming to seek out and lean on human interaction is greater than the challenges that we face causing us to seek out new and creative ways to connect. Technology has made that possible. Mention the word Zoom to someone more than five months ago and chances are the first image that would pop up is a race car, or a road runner for those old enough to remember the classic Warner Bros. cartoon.

Now, it's understood and recognized as one of our primary tools for connection and many of our Blue Zones Project partners and organizations are finding creative ways to take advantage of this virtual meeting platform.

“Since we work closely as a team, it has been a hardship not seeing everyone,” says Olga Placeres, President/CFO of Preferred Travel of Naples, Inc.

“We see each other on training calls and communicate with emails, but the technol-

ogy doesn't replace the socialization.”

That's why she decided to start a Zoom Pour at Four every Friday. Anywhere between 20 and 40 team members gather on Zoom each week with a glass of wine to have conversation and connect. “With our “Pour at Fours” we can socialize and share positive things personally and professionally that have happened to us during the week and have fun with it,” says Placeres.

In the last two months, the Pour at Four has taken a creative leap to include different themes. So far, attendees have created backgrounds and worn clothing to represent places like Cuba, Jamaica, Ireland and Italy.

“Last month's theme was Italy and I decided to go with a Roman Toga,” said Sue Huff, a marketing and public relations professional in Southwest Florida.

“I looked in my linen closet and grabbed a tablecloth, put a gold ribbon around my head and added a photo of the Roman ruins behind me. I arrived in a full Zoom room of travel advisors who were laughing and having a good time. It was truly an uplifting of spirits and a nice way to still have a community gathering safely.”

Lisa Cook, founder of Plan B Connections, a local Blue Zones Project organization that dedicates itself to forging meaningful social connections in our community, has also quickly adapted to the new social distancing measures with Zoom Chat Meetups.

“We recently did a Zoom chat on ‘Where Do You Find Community?’ where we watched a short movie called Dial-a-Ride about rural seniors in South Whales who found community through regularly riding a bus,” says Lisa.

“We talked about the surprising places community is found nowadays. One attendee shared a story of finding community on a bus during her daily commutes to work where if a regular commuter missed the bus, fellow bus riders would be genuinely concerned for them.”

Plan B Connections prides itself in having become a virtual “Friendship Bench” connecting people through meaningful get to know you conversations. “I have been an active Meetup event host since moving to Naples three years ago and I love connecting small groups of people in meaningful ways,” says Lisa.

To join a Plan B Connections group, visit [meetup.com/Plan-B-Connections](http://meetup.com/Plan-B-Connections).

To help maintain well-being through connection in the community, Blue Zones Pro-

ject Southwest Florida has also jumped on the Zoom train with their virtual Purpose Workshops and Well-Being Wednesday Moai Groups. “We have found that by going virtual, there are many people who have participated that would not have done so when we were doing this in person,” said Rafael Campo, Engagement Lead with Blue Zones Project. “While COVID-19 separated us in some ways, it has managed to connect us in other ways and we are grateful for that silver lining.” To connect at a virtual Purpose Workshop or Well-Being Moai, visit [BlueZonesProjectSWFL.Eventbrite.com](http://BlueZonesProjectSWFL.Eventbrite.com).

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc. and Blue Zones, LLC, Blue Zones Project is a vital part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).

### Online Power Nine activity of the week

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida wants to know how you are living the Power 9, a set of shared principles followed by the longest-lived people.

Each week, we will have a specific Power 9 activity for you to try and share with us.

This week's Power 9 activity is Belong.

Most of the world's longest-lived people belong to some faith-based community. Research shows that attending faith-based services four times per month will add 4-14 years of life expectancy.

Before Covid-19, most faith-based communities relied on in person gatherings for worship and fellowship. Tell us the creative ways your faith-based community has maintained connection and worship among those who belong while practicing social distancing.

Share with us by commenting or by tagging us on Facebook @Blue Zones Project – Southwest Florida, or you can email us at [bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com](mailto:bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com) to be entered in our prize drawing for a gift card from one of our Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants.

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