

filling in the personal community map

writing names on the 'personal community map': Please indicate on the map all the people who are important to you now, at this stage of your life. These relationships may include family, friends, a partner or spouse, children, people you work with, neighbours, and even pets. 'S' in the centre of the map refers to you - the 'self'. Position each name on the map to represent how 'close' you feel in your relationship with this person. You don't have to use all the circles on the map. Alternatively you can position people even further away beyond the outer circle if you want to. Please represent friends by writing down their first name (if there is more than one person with the same name, add the first letter of their surname as well). Represent family members by writing down their particular relationship with you (e.g. mother, brother, etc). Again, where necessary – for example if you have several brothers – distinguish people by adding further names or initials.

adding more detail: In brackets under each name, put whether they live locally to you or not. If you can relatively easily travel to where they live, spend some time with them, and then get home again in an evening or half a day, classify the relationship as 'local' using an 'L'. Otherwise classify it as 'non-local' using 'NL'. For non-family members, please note approximately for how many years you have known them. Also briefly include details of how or where you first became acquainted (e.g. school, university or college, work, neighbour, shared interests, etc). Finally, beside each name, add abbreviations to indicate what kind of relationship you have with this person. Where possible please use the abbreviations described below. You may find there are some people on your map where your relationship with them is best described using more than one abbreviation. That's fine – use as many abbreviations as you need to. If you want to, name the different circles on the map as well (e.g. 'close friends', 'acquaintances', and so on).

*simple
relationship*

ASS, 'associate' – the relationship is based entirely on sharing a common interest or activity, meeting in a particular context such as a workplace or pub, or belonging to a particular organization such as a club or church. These relationships are 'tightly framed' and meetings typically only occur within the shared activity or context.

UC, 'useful contact' – link mainly involves exchanging information or using influence on each other's behalf. These are not usually affectionate or committed ties – the primary basis is a willingness to give advice or pull strings. People who put a lot of effort into networking are often cultivating relationships of this type.

FVR, 'favour/neighbourly' – relationship based on doing good turns for each other. Typically these contacts live locally and are 'tightly framed' around exchanging practical help. Examples include watering plants, feeding pets, putting out rubbish, giving lifts, lending things and so on.

FUN, 'fun/social' – light-hearted social relationship. The link is often quite casual, but it can be very warm & affectionate. The bond may lack other friend-like qualities, but the good company and lack of obligations can make up for this. Fun links are often good starting points for relationships which become more complex & multi-stranded over time, but some of these relationships may never change their basic fun form.

HLP, 'helpmate' – a combination of fun/social & favour/neighbourly relationships. Helpmates are often solid, dependable people who one can ask for practical help and also have fun & socialize with. They are not however deeply confided in or looked to for emotional support.

SUP, 'comforter' – relationship combining socializing, practical help and sympathetic emotional support. Receiving emotional support involves showing some vulnerability. Many relationships lack this level of trust. Some people may only open up this much to family and some people may not share in this way with anyone.

CNF, 'confidant' – relationship involving fun/socializing and also disclosure of personal information. Sometimes confiding is cool, acting as a sounding board for a discussion of problems & possible solutions while not engaging on an emotional level. At other times confiding is hot, with emotional support also being given.

SLM, 'soulmate' – the most multistranded relationship of all. Soulmates are people we confide in, share help and emotional support with, and also really enjoy their company. They are kindred spirits, who are 'on the same wavelength', sharing a similar outlook on life. There is a strong emotional bond, a high degree of commitment, and a keen sense of connection, of knowing each other 'inside out'.

*complex
relationship*

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Please make sure you have added abbreviations to describe all the people – both family & friends – on your personal community map. A final abbreviation, that it is useful to use, is:

STRS, 'stress' – the relationship is a source of stress (conflict, worry, obligation, time pressure, etc) in your life.

different kinds of personal community

This way of assessing and classifying personal communities emerged from qualitative research by Liz Spencer & Ray Pahl at the UK Institute for Social & Economic Research using in depth interviews with a sample of 60 people. Of course they found these people's personal communities were very varied. For example, numerically they ranged from naming only 5 people in their community to as many as 41. Analysis highlighted six different dimensions as particularly important: 1.) the criteria people used when deciding on their personal communities; 2.) the relative number of different kinds of tie and in particular the ratio of family members to friends; 3.) the relative importance of different types of relationship on people's map and who is near the centre; 4.) the range of friendship types included (see 'repertoires' below); 5.) the way in which people make and retain friends throughout their life course (see 'modes' below); 6.) the breadth of roles played by friends, family or partner and the extent to which these roles overlap or are highly specialised. Variations on these six underlying dimensions produce different patterns of personal community. Wellbeing and both mental & physical health seem best encouraged through the multi-stranded support of *Friend-based* and *Family-based* communities with their rich diversity of available relationships. In contrast, *Partner-based* & *Professional-based* personal communities tend to be vulnerable with 'too many eggs in one basket'. Healthy and health-giving personal communities seem typically best developed and maintained using a broad, evolving style (see below).

friendship 'repertoires': People vary in the range of friendships they include in their personal communities. Spencer & Pahl found four general patterns: a.) *Basic repertoires* where only 'simple' friendships are included – typically 'fun' friends and 'associates'. It's family members or a partner who are looked to for more intimacy or support, although in some cases people preferred to sort things out just on their own. b.) *Intense repertoires* with only 'complex' close friendships (and family members) included. A sharp distinction is made between 'true friends' & other relationships which are not considered sufficiently important to be on the map. c.) *Focal repertoires* where there is a small core of soulmates or confidants and a much larger group of fun friends & associates. d.) *Broad repertoires* contain both simple and complex friendships with a wider range of types from fun friends & associates to helpmates, supporters, confidants & soulmates (although there are rarely more than 1 or 2 soulmates). People with this kind of repertoire take their friendships seriously, appreciating particular qualities of different kinds of friendship.

friendship 'modes': This describes the different ways that friends are made, kept or lost at major life-course transitions: a.) *Bounded friendship mode* is where most of a person's important friendships have been made at a particular life-stage (e.g. late teens, or at university, or when the children were young, etc). New ties remain casual friends or acquaintances. b.) *Serial mode*, in contrast, involves almost completely replacing one's friends at each new life-stage. Often this mode goes with being highly mobile geographically. c.) *Evolving mode* includes elements of both *Bounded* and *Serial modes*. People with this pattern are open to forming significant new friendships, but also remain loyal to current relationships. d.) *Ruptured mode* involves an almost complete replacement of all one's friends following a dramatic change in circumstances. The person may previously have had a *Bounded* or *Evolving* pattern, but then nearly all earlier friendships are lost due to a serious illness, coming out as gay, a difficult divorce, or some other major event.

Ideas in this handout are based on research described in '*Rethinking friendship: hidden solidarities today*' by Liz Spencer & Ray Pahl, Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006.
