



ROOTED RECLAIMERS FOUR Pillars · BOOK 4

FREE BASICS EDITION

Connection

*Belonging, Boundaries, and Building
Community Together*

Dr. Stephen Thompson, DC, DACM, BCTMB, CNT, FAIHM

A companion to *Journey from the Edge* · rootedreclaimers.com

About this guide

This is the free Basics edition of *Connection*, one of four Rooted Reclaimers pillar books: Breathe, Movement, Nutrition, and Connection. The pillar books are companions to *Journey from the Edge: From Weaponized Survival to Self-Reclamation* by Dr. Stephen Thompson.

This guide explains the core idea of the Connection pillar and gives you a few practices you can start today. It takes about fifteen minutes to read.

Before you begin

This book offers education and self-directed practice. It doesn't diagnose, treat, or cure any condition, and your own medical, mental-health, and emergency providers stay in charge of your care.

- **Go at your own pace.** You can adapt, shorten, or skip any practice.
- **Stop a practice** if it causes pain, dizziness, lightheadedness, distress, or worsening symptoms. Return to your usual breathing, look around the room, and reach out for support if the feeling continues.
- **Check with your clinician first** if you're pregnant, recovering from surgery or injury, or living with a heart, lung, seizure, eating, or other medical condition that these practices could affect.
- **Use what fits.** Some pages discuss stress and trauma. You can use every part of this book without reliving a painful experience.

If you're in crisis right now: In the US, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line), or call **911** if you or another person is in immediate danger. Outside the US, contact your local emergency number or find a crisis line at findahelpline.com.

Why Connection matters

A patient I'll call T. came to the clinic exhausted. She'd spent years trying to make it on her own, working hard to stay safe, fit in, and avoid more disappointment. "I'm not sure I'll ever feel like I truly belong anywhere," she told me. "Too much has happened."

T. is a composite, and I've changed names and identifying details.

Wanting to belong is a basic human need, and strong, careful people feel it too. In my work with patients of all backgrounds, I've seen people of every political view, belief, and circumstance want it. Some of them feel it as loneliness or mistrust, and others feel like outsiders, even in a crowded room or a busy family.

Being connected to other people often helps a person feel more like themselves again, even when old hurts remain. What helps is having a place where you can be honest and where other people value your story and your skills. Many people find it easier to keep healing when they have support.

Research suggests connection matters for health too. A large review of 148 studies found that people with stronger social relationships had about 50 percent higher odds of survival over the years those studies followed them (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). That research shows a link. It can't prove that relationships alone cause the difference, and many things shape health. It does suggest that connection is worth the same attention you give breathing, movement, and nutrition.

Reaching out can also feel risky, especially after years of hurt and disappointment, and that reaction is normal. Loneliness and mistrust can go together, too: in one lab study, adults who felt very lonely reported less trust in others than adults who felt less lonely (Lieberz et al., 2021). That's why this guide starts small and private. Every practice here is something you can do quietly, on your own terms, with people who feel safe to you.

Three core ideas

I. Connection often starts small

In the circles I've worked with, I've watched people relax when another member recognizes what they're going through. The recognition is often small: a nod, a smile, or a laugh that says, "I know that feeling too." For many people, the first step is a willingness to say, "Here's where I am. Is anyone else out there?" You can begin with one safe person, one kind message, or one quiet moment of noticing.

2. You choose what to share, and listening counts

Trust builds slowly, as you keep coming back. Some people find that sharing a struggle, at their own pace and with people they trust, makes it feel more manageable. Others take part by listening for a long time, and that's a full way to belong. You can connect with other people without telling them your personal history, health details, or trauma. Your "no" matters as much as your "yes."

3. Boundaries make connection safer

Connection helps most when the people around you are safe, and some relationships aren't. If a person hurts you, threatens you, controls your money or phone, cuts you off from others, or makes you afraid to say no, your safety comes first. You don't have to reconnect with a person who has harmed you, and you don't have to explain that choice.

TAKE CARE

If a relationship feels unsafe

In the US, contact the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**: call **1-800-799-7233** or text **START to 88788**. An advocate can help you make a safety plan. If a partner or family member may be checking your phone or computer, use a device they can't access when you look for help. If you're in immediate danger, call **911** or your local emergency number.

Community support and professional care do different jobs, and many people need both. If sadness, anxiety, or painful memories feel like too much, or you have questions about symptoms or treatment, reach out to your clinician or a licensed mental-health professional.

Try this

These practices are private and low-pressure, and you can keep them to yourself.

Practice · Name one safe person

Time: about 5 minutes · **Position:** anywhere comfortable, with paper or your phone

1. Find a quiet moment and something to write with.
2. Ask yourself, “Who feels safe to me?” Think of a person who respects your “no,” doesn’t pressure you, and leaves you feeling a little steadier after time together.
3. Write down one name. It could be a friend, a relative, a neighbor, a counselor, a faith leader, or a member of a group you belong to.
4. Next to the name, write one word about why they feel safe.

Make it easier: If you can’t think of a name right now, that’s common, especially after hard years. Write down a place where you feel welcome, or the kind of person you’d like to meet. That shows you where to start.

Stop and switch if: thinking about people brings up distress or painful memories. Set the page aside, look around the room, and name a few things you can see. You can come back another day.

Practice · Send one small message

Time: 2 to 5 minutes · **With:** the safe person you named, or another person who feels safe

1. Choose a safe person. Skip any person who has hurt you, pressured you, or asked for space.
2. Send a short message, such as “Thinking of you today” or “Saw this and remembered you.”
3. Keep it short. You can skip any explanation of the time since you last talked.
4. Let go of whether they reply. Reaching out is the practice, whatever happens next.

Make it easier: Write the message and save it as a draft to send another day, or write a note you keep for yourself.

Stop and switch if: reaching out brings up fear or pressure, or you realize the person may not be safe for you. Stop there. Your safety matters more than reconnecting.

Practice · Notice where you feel at ease

Time: about 5 minutes · **Position:** sitting, standing, or lying down, wherever feels comfortable

1. Find a spot where you feel physically comfortable and safe, like your favorite chair, a park bench, or a corner of a café.
2. Notice your surroundings: the sounds, the light, and the chair or ground beneath you.
3. Ask yourself, “What helps me feel at ease here?”
4. Notice whether any of it could help you around other people, such as sitting near a door or having a friend beside you.

Noticing where you feel comfortable can help you recognize what you need before you spend time with others.

Make it easier: Keep your eyes open and focus on sounds or objects around you. One minute counts.

Stop and switch if: you start to feel distressed, numb, or far away. Look around, name a few things you can see, and move gently.

Your first three days

Try one practice each day, in this order or your own. Write a few words about what you noticed, or leave the space blank on a busy day.

DAY	PRACTICE	WHAT I NOTICED
1	Name one safe person	
2	Notice where you feel at ease	
3	Send one small message	

REFLECT

Reflect

- Which practice felt most natural to you?
- What made connection feel a little easier, or a little harder?
- What's one small thing you'd like to keep doing?

Skip any question that brings up more than you want to explore today.

Add it to My Ground Plan

My Ground Plan is your own page for the smallest version of each practice and your plan for harder days. Write down the smallest connection practice that still felt worth doing.

My smallest connection practice: _____

Inside the full book

- Introduction: Why Connection Matters
- Boundaries and Safety
- Chapter 1: What Other People's Stories Show Us
- Chapter 2: Healing Together: How Shared Struggle Builds Trust
- Chapter 3: Building Healthy Circles and Coalitions
- Chapter 4: The Problems & Solutions Game: Turning Insight into Action
- Chapter 5: Rituals, Community, and Next Steps
- Seven Days of Connection
- References

Go deeper

The full *Connection* book has every chapter, more practices, a practice log, and the research behind each practice.

Rooted Reset includes the full book. The 30-day guided program comes with all four full pillar books, 30 daily lessons, a weekly live group session, and My Ground Plan.

- **Start free:** Starter Ground, a free seven-day introduction, at rootedreclaimers.com/starter-ground.html
- **Go further:** Rooted Reset, at rootedreclaimers.com/rooted-reset.html
- **Read the framework:** *Journey from the Edge*, available on Amazon

About the author

Dr. Stephen Thompson, DC, DACM, BCTMB, CNT, FAIHM, is an integrative clinician, educator, and author based in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. He treats people living with chronic pain, burnout, autoimmune conditions, and long-term stress, and he teaches clinicians and organizations.

He wrote *Journey from the Edge* and founded Rooted Reclaimers, the first stage of The Founded Project.

rootedreclaimers.com • thefoundedproject.com

References

- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>
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