









Connection Guide

for individuals



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Why Connection Matters

Human beings are biologically wired for connection. Over many years, our brains have adapted to expect being close to others. Lacking connection hurts our health and wellbeing because it is as essential to survival as oxygen, food, water, and shelter. When we get lonely, it's a sign that we could use some meaningful connection—with ourselves or others, enriching activities, greater purpose, and a safe community.

It's up to each of us to take a step towards connection. This can start with building strong and meaningful relationships, so no one feels alone. Look for opportunities to connect with your neighbors and get to know each other in fun, relaxing, and positive ways. Say hi to the person you see on your morning walk or call a friend you haven't spoken to in a while. Step out of your comfort zone and explore all of the activities and experiences our community has to offer!

Check out this Connection Guide for ways to inspire connection in your life and our community at-large.



Build strong and meaningful connections

So no one feels alone.

Think someone you know might be experiencing loneliness? It's important to identify and connect with those people in your life that may be experiencing loneliness.

Some common signs that someone may be experiencing loneliness are:

- They seem isolated or disconnected from other people.
- They feel that nobody understands them.
- They say they have nobody to turn to or talk with.
- They tell you they're feeling sad and/or lonely.
- You may also notice physical changes such as lack of focus or concentration and changes in appetite, sleep, or energy levels.

If you notice these things, you should:

- Ask the person how they are feeling and if they think they may be lonely.
- Stay in touch with them through visits, calls, or messages.
- Suggest activities to do together.
- Be reliable and honor the commitments you've made. If you've said you'd call or visit be sure to followthrough and call/visit them.
- Suggest they contact a healthcare professional (physician or counselor) if they are having difficulties with their mental health and their loneliness doesn't improve.



Creating Connection



easier it will become, especially when you start feeling the positive benefits of connecting with others.

Invest in Relationships

Make time to nurture your relationships by staying engaged and connecting regularly. When we open up to others, it makes us feel heard and like we're not alone.

- Reach out to a friend or family member each day, and make your interactions meaningful.
- Say hi to the person you see on your morning walk
- Call a friend you haven't spoken with in a while to catch up

Engage with People from Different **Backgrounds**

Connect with people from various backgrounds and experiences. This not only broadens your understanding but also enriches your relationships with diverse perspectives.

• Read stories of understanding, community, and belonging from people across America at Belonging Begins with Us.

Look for Ways to Serve and **Support Others**

Volunteering is a great way to connect with people, gain a sense of purpose, support causes that resonate with you, and build meaningful relationships.

Find ways to help out—whether it's supporting your family, coworkers, friends, or getting involved in community service. Your efforts can make a big difference through opportunities like:

- <u>United Way of Weld's Volunteer page</u>
- VolunteerMatch

Get Outside

Being in nature helps calm us, and parks are a great place to meet up with friends!

 OutdoorRx has a full list of all parks and recreational facilities located in Weld County.

Build Relationships with Your Neighbors

Getting to know your neighbors promotes a sense of belonging and pride in your local area. It helps create a friendly atmosphere where people feel more engaged and connected.

- Host a yard sale and invite your neighbors to host one at the same time.
 Find things to chat about while you are both working on your yard sales.
- Set up a sidewalk stand for Mother's or Father's Day with treats for parents in the neighborhood. You can do this for any special observance day.
- Start a May Day Basket tradition in your neighborhood. This can be adapted for the first day of summer, fall, or winter.
- Host a neighborhood drive or block party.
- Write a chalk question on your driveway. Leave chalk for people to answer.



Be Responsive, Supportive, and Grateful

Show appreciation and support in your interactions. When you practice gratitude and responsiveness, others are more likely to do the same, strengthening your relationships and building strong social connections.

- Explore <u>Random Acts of Kindness</u> for kindness challenges for the whole family that can help connect us.
- Take the <u>Surgeon General's 5-for-5</u>
 <u>Connection Challenge</u> to build and strengthen your own relationships and inspire others to incorporate connection as a daily part of their lives.

Join Social and Community Groups

Participate in groups that interest you—whether they're fitness clubs, religious gatherings, hobby groups, professional networks, or community service organizations. These connections help foster a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose.

- Check out <u>High Plains Library District's</u>
 calendar for events/activities, such as
 book or art clubs. This is a great way to
 kickstart a new interest or reinvest in an
 old one.
- Join a class to learn a new skill, such as painting, cooking, or woodworking.
 Meetup.com offers events that match whatever your interest—from hiking and reading to networking and skill sharing.



Reflect Core Values in Your Interactions

Think about how you can bring kindness, respect, and service into your conversations and actions. Ask yourself questions like:

- How can I make this interaction more positive?
- What does treating others with respect look like?
- How can I show my commitment to others?

Smile at a stranger. Simple acts of kindness actually release endorphins in our brain that make us feel better and more connected. Even these simple connections can have a meaningful impact on our feelings of loneliness.

Cut Back on Things That Make You Feel Disconnected

Try to reduce habits that can lead to feeling isolated—like excessive social media use, unhealthy relationships, or spending too much time in front of screens instead of engaging with people in real life.

- Start by becoming aware of where you stand on the loneliness spectrum. Take the <u>Connection</u> <u>Quiz on the Acts of Connection</u> website.
- Find more tools to address loneliness and live more connected at <u>Only7Seconds.com</u>.
- Discover the power of social connection to help you feel at <u>Far</u> from Alone.

Be Present During Conversations

Put away distractions during conversations to make your time together more valuable. Spending too much time on our phones can actually make us feel more lonely. By taking time away from the screen, we leave more time for connecting with the people around us. Avoid checking your phone during meals, important talks, or family moments.

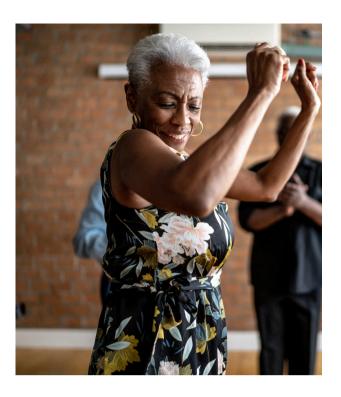


Get Involved in Our Community

Find ways to engage, like attending town hall meetings, checking out live music on the weekends, or visiting different towns in our county for their unique festivals. Being an active part of your community can strengthen your connection with others.

Keep up with what's happening so you can join in and help promote connection:

- Ault Events
- Eaton Events
- Evans Events
- Firestone Events
- Fort Lupton Events
- Frederick Events
- <u>Greeley Downtown</u> <u>Development Authority</u>
- <u>High Plains Library District</u> <u>Events</u>
- Johnstown Events
- Mead Events
- Milliken Events
- Windsor Events



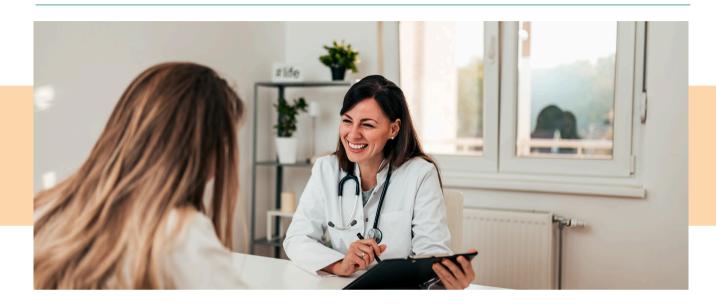


Spread the word about Acts of Connection

Let your network know how important connection is and share the Acts of Connection campaign with them. Spread the word on social media to help us reach even more people! You can find us on Facebook: @ActsofConnectionWeld.

Sometimes, no matter what we do, we can still feel lonely. If you've tried combatting loneliness or your loved one has, but find that it's not helping, it's okay to consult a healthcare professional.

If you're feeling lonely, make an appointment with them to talk about your feelings of loneliness. If your loved one has a doctor, you should suggest they make an appointment.



COMMUNITY HEALTH RESOURCES

North Range Behavioral Health

- Integrated care for mental health, crisis services, counseling, suicide prevention, and addiction treatment for all ages, individual and family.
 - 970-347-2120

Sunrise Community Health

- Affordable, quality care focused on medical, behavioral health, dental care, care management, and more. Partners with North Range Behavioral Health for mental health, behavioral health, and addiction services.
 - Monfort Family Clinic: 970-353-9403; 2930 11th Avenue in Evans
 - Adelante Clinic: 970-313-0400; 1010 A Street in Greeley
 - Sunrise North Range Clinic: 970-350-5313; 1300 N. 17th Avenue in Greeley

Salud Family Health Centers

- Affordable, quality care focused on medical, behavioral health, dental care, and more
 - 970-484-0999
 - Fort Lupton Clinic: 1115 2nd Street in Fort Lupton
 - Frederick Clinic: 5995 Iris Parkway in Frederick

Aging Adults

Aging Adults can sometimes feel lonely due to:

- · Living alone
- Loss of friends or family
- Chronic health conditions
- Hearing loss
- Mental health challenges
- Life events such as: retirement, job loss or change, or a move to new area

It's important to be aware of where you stand on the loneliness spectrum. Take the <u>Connection</u>
<u>Quiz on the Acts of Connection</u>
website.



Some things you should try first are:

- Reach out to friends, family members, or colleagues you haven't talked with in a while and start a conversation.
- Schedule time each day to connect with others in person, by phone, or online start calling your old friends or family that you haven't talked to in a while (and do this every week!).
- Practice self-care and focus on enjoyable activities.
- Use positive self-talk and acknowledge personal successes and good qualities.
- Find out someone's interests connect with them through these interests.
- Be a good listener. Practice empathy and put yourself in someone else's shoes.
- Visualize what a good relationship with someone would be like for you.
- Find a community or support group online or use social media to connect with like-minded people.

Once you feel more comfortable reaching out and connecting you could try:

- Volunteering in the community or with a local organization – be sure to tell the coordinator you want to volunteer in a way that lets you connect with others.
- Engaging in enjoyable activities, pursue a hobby, or take a class to learn a new skill – get out to meet new people and connect with a community that shares the same interests you have.
- Getting regular exercise. Consider joining a walking or exercise group.
- Reaching out to connect with neighbors, colleagues, or others in your community.
- Looking for events, meetups, or local activities.
- Considering adopting a pet, if you are able to care for one.



Remember – just reaching out and making an effort to connect is a great starting point.



Be willing to try new things. Signing up and showing up opens the pathway to connection.

Be patient and willing: it may take asking different people and trying out different activities before you find the person or activity that is the right fit for you and your lifestyle.

Aging Adults

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Administration for Community Living
 Commit to Connect webpage: Offers
 activities, ideas and resources on how to
 connect.
- <u>Area Agency on Aging:</u> Offers resources for older adults (60+) and their family caregivers.
 - 970-400-6950
- Big & Mini Program: Connects older adults with people generally 18 to 25 years old. Matches are made using an algorithm that considers each person's interests, background, and availability. Participants connect through video calls.
 - o 817-755-0775
- <u>Community Grief Center:</u> Provides support for those grieving a loved one, with services for children, teens, and adults.
 - 970-506-4414
- <u>CSU Extension classes</u>: Learn cooking skills and facts about nutrition through inperson or virtual classes.
 - 970-491-6281

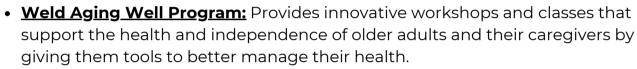




- <u>Dementia Together:</u> Helps people impacted by dementia to live well through connections, programs, coaching, and support groups.
- <u>Friendly Fork:</u> Offer a nutritious lunch with social and education opportunities.
 - Reservations may be made by calling the Friendly Fork voicemail at 970-400-6955 or emailing friendlyfork@weld.gov.
- <u>High Plains Library District</u>: Check out local events and activities, such as book or hobby clubs. This is a great way to kickstart a new interest or reinvest in an old one.
 - 1-888-861-7323 (READ)
- SAGE National LGBT Elder Hotline: If you are an LGBT elder or care for one, call 877-360-LGBT(5428) to connect to a LGBT responder who is certified, friendly, and ready to listen and offer support. The hotline is free and available 24/7.
- <u>Senior Peer Counseling:</u> Senior Peer Counselors are 55 years old or older, schedule visits in the privacy of your home or assisted living facility, and offer support at no-cost.
 - Call 970-347-2120 or visit
 NorthRange.org to learn more.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR AGING ADULTS

- **Service Clubs:** Service clubs give volunteers the opportunity to help and serve others, form connections with other community leaders, and establish local connections.
 - o Greeley Kiwanis Club: 970.330.8902
 - o Greeley Lions Club: 970-351-0169
 - Greeley Rotary Club
- <u>UC Health's Aspen Club:</u> Join this community of support groups, classes, and events to meet new people, learn new things, and get active.
 - o 970-495-8560



- 970-400-6117
- <u>5-for-5 Connection Challenge</u>: This challenge from the Surgeon General can help to build and strengthen your own relationships and inspire others to incorporate connection as a daily part of their lives.

Active Adult Centers in Weld County

- Carbon Valley Senior Center, 6615 Frederick Way in Frederick, 303-833-3660
- Eaton, 970-454-1070
- Evans Senior Center, 1100 37th Street in Evans, 970-475-1125
- Fort Lupton Active Adults, 130 S McKinley Avenue in Fort Lupton, 303-857-6694
- Greeley Active Adult Center, 1010 6th Street in Greeley, 970-350-9440
- Hill N' Park Senior Center, 4205 Yosemite Drive in Greeley, 970-330-8619
- Johnstown Senior Center, 101 Charlotte Street in Johnstown, 970-587-5251
- Kersey Community Center, 215 2nd Street in Kersey, 970-353-1681, ext 2
- LaSalle Senior Community, 970-284-0900
- Lochbuie, 303-659-8262
- Mead Older Active Adults, 970-400-6955
- Milliken Senior Center, 1101 Broad Street in Milliken, 970-660-5040
- Nunn, 775 3rd Street in Nunn, 970-897-2459
- Pierce Senior Resources, 970-834-2655
- Platteville, 720-815-8136
- Wattenberg, 970-400-6955
- Windsor Active Adults, 250 N 11th Street, Windsor, 970-674-3500



Young People



There are many reasons we feel lonely, and sometimes there is not a reason at all! Here are some of the more common causes to be aware of:

- Leaving home
- Relationship changes
- Adjusting to full-time work
- Increased technology use
- Mental health challenges
- Job changes
- Adjusting to adult-life

We know that it's hard to go outside of our comfort zone and try something new or reach out to someone, but the connections that we make are worth the risk. Connecting with other people makes us feel less alone. We can all choose to be brave by putting ourselves out there and taking the first step!

Even people who seem happy often can feel lonely. It's important to identify and connect with people in your life that may be experiencing loneliness.

Some common signs that someone may be experiencing loneliness are:

- They seem isolated or disconnected from other people
- They feel like no one understands them
- They say they have no one to talk to or with
- They tell you they feel sad and/or lonely
- They have different energy levels, appetite, or ability to focus

It's important to be aware of where you stand on the loneliness spectrum. Take the Connection Quiz on the Acts of Connection website.

CONNECTION IDEAS:

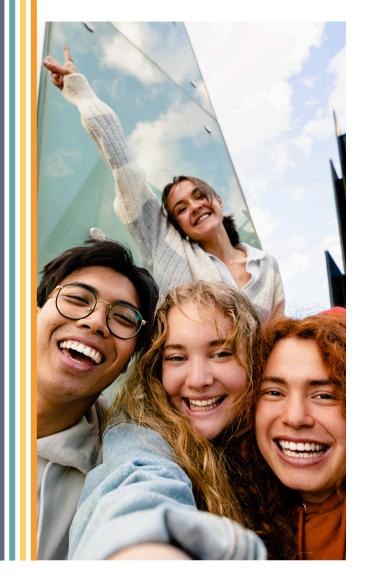
- Turn activities you do alone into group activities. If you're into gaming, invite someone over to play with you inperson. If you like to draw, ask your parents to help you find an in-person art class.
- Get creative. Join an art, drama, or music club that meets after school.
 Doing this can help you plug into your passions and create new friendships.
- Chat with a friend. When we connect with others and open up, it makes us feel heard and like we are not alone.
 Call or text a friend and make plans to hang out after school or this weekend.
- Minimize distractions during conversations. When you are talking to someone, give them your full attention. This helps you engage more with what the person is saying and helps the person feel as though you care about what they have to say. Win-win!



Remember: just reaching out and making an effort to connect is a great starting point.



- Check out <u>High Plains Library District's</u>
 calendar for events and activities, such
 as book or hobby clubs. This is a great way
 to kickstart a new interest or reinvest in an
 old one.
- Seek out service opportunities through volunteering. Studies show that giving back to others has just as much of a positive effect on the person who is helping as the person being helped. Giving back to your community gives you a chance to connect with others and the greater good!



- Smile at a stranger. Simple acts of kindness actually release endorphins in our brain that make us feel better and more connected. Even these simple connections can have a meaningful impact on our feelings of loneliness.
- Check in with a neighbor and see how you can help them. In addition to helping someone who might be in need, you might also hear some pretty cool stories!
- Talk with a trusted adult. Youth in Colorado receive up to 6 free sessions with a mental health professional through iMatter. You can also visit www.NorthRange.org for local behavioral health care.

- Think about your relationship with social media. Spending too much time on our phones can actually make us feel more lonely. By taking time away from the screen, we leave more time for connecting with the people around us.
- Exercise. Join a sports team or gym where you can take classes with or learn from others. When we move our bodies, it relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. In other words, it makes our brains feel good! Exercise is even more fun when we can do it with friends.
- Try something new. Now is the perfect time to try something you've always wanted to try, but never have! If you're interested in acting, try auditioning for a school play or a local theater group. Love sports? Join a new team, or maybe there's a weekend clinic you can sign up for. There are tons of potential new hobbies out there.
- Write a postcard to a friend or family member who lives far away from you. With everything online, it's fun to receive physical mail!





Young People

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Online:

- <u>Basics for Supporting Friends from Mental Health America:</u> Explore resources to help support your friends and feel empowered.
- **<u>Belonging Begins with Us:</u>** Read stories of understanding, community, and belonging from people across America.
- **Far from Alone:** Discover the power of social connection to help you feel #FarFromAlone.
- <u>Forward Together:</u> Check out positive messages and real-life tools to find and connect with your people.
- <u>Only 7 Seconds:</u> Find ideas on how to reach out and start a conversation with those around you. It only takes 7 seconds to change someone's day.
- <u>5-for-5 Connection Challenge</u>: This challenge from the Surgeon General can help to build and strengthen your own relationships.

Local:

- <u>Boys & Girls Clubs of Weld County:</u> Find your voice and accomplish your goals at the Teen Center in Greeley.
- <u>Boy Scouts Of America</u>: Learn leadership, communication and outdoor skills by joining a scouts groups.
- <u>IMatterColorado</u>: Connect with a therapist for up to 6 free virtual counseling sessions (some in-person appointments available, too) that are completely confidential. Talking with someone can make you feel better.
- **North Range Behavioral Health:** Learn how to take care of your mental health through talking with a professional.
- <u>OutdoorRX</u>: Get outside. Being in nature helps calm us and parks are a great place to meet up with our friends! OutdoorRx has a full list of all parks and recreational facilities located in Weld County.
- <u>Soccer Without Borders Greeley</u>: Join a local soccer team to make friends and get active!
- **Volunteer Match:** Get matched to volunteer with an organization that relates to your passions and helps build connection to yourself and the greater good.
- <u>Weld County Youth Conservation Corp</u>: Participate in meaningful community and conservation (land, water, energy) service projects throughout Weld County.



In the U.S., 1 in 5 adults are caregivers -- serving a key role in providing supportive care for community members in need of extra help with daily life activities. Often, caregivers are family members or friends who may slowly or suddenly find themselves taking on the responsibilities of loved ones such as grandparents and young children.

While caregiving can be rewarding, it can also bring about increased stress and feelings of being alone. 50% of caregivers report social isolation, which can further lead to burnout and strain.

As you take care of others, make sure to take time to care for yourself.

You can't pour from an empty cup.

Creating Connection for Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are key in shaping how we experience social connection. While these tips are especially for parents of children and teens, many of them can also apply to all types of caregivers.



for meaningful relationships in the future.

- Parent Engagement through the "I Have A Dream" Foundation of Boulder County: Improve your connection with your children and understand how the way you were raised, your culture, and your beliefs impact the way you are raising your children.
- Parenting Education through Lutheran Family Services of the Rocky Mountains: Learn normal child development, how to be there for your child, and self-care strategies.
- <u>Supporting Young Minds Resource Guide</u> from Mental Health America: Learn how adults can support young people to feel empowered, and how youth can feel empowered to address their mental health and support each other.

Watch for Signs of Loneliness

Be aware of potential warning signs like spending more time alone, excessive online activity, fewer interactions with friends, or seeking attention excessively.

- Only7Seconds' A Parents Guide to Lonely Teenagers is a free guide to help navigate your teenagers loneliness & equip them with resources and skill sets for connection.
- Encourage your loved one to become aware of where they stand on the loneliness spectrum. Take the Connection Quiz on the Acts of Connection website.

Talk Openly About Social Connection

Have regular conversations with your your loved one about social connections. This helps them feel comfortable sharing if they're dealing with loneliness or isolation, and it reduces the stigma around discussing these feelings.

Model Healthy Social Connections

Show what healthy relationships look like by practicing positive conflict resolution, spending quality time together, and staying in touch with extended family, friends, and neighbors. Set aside moments for socializing without the distractions of technology or social media, and get involved in community events to strengthen your connections.

• <u>5-for-5 Connection Challenge</u>: This challenge from the Surgeon General can help to build and strengthen your own relationships and inspire others to incorporate connection as a daily part of their lives.





Foster Peer Relationships

Help your loved one cultivate friendships and get involved in activities that promote healthy social connections. Support their participation in volunteering, sports, community events, and mentorship programs to build a strong network of supportive peers.

See pages 14-17 for ideas on how young people can create connection. See pages 10-13 on how aging adults can create connection.

Reduce Risk Factors for Social Disconnection

Keep an eye out for behaviors or experiences that might increase the risk of social disconnection, such as bullying or excessive social media use. Take steps to address these issues and promote healthier interactions.





Support Strong Relationships with Trusted Adults

Encourage your child or teen to build trusting, stable relationships with supportive adults like grandparents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and mentors. These connections can provide valuable guidance and support.

- Partners Youth Mentoring:
 Provides mentorship and support for youth who need it the most through building strong relationships.
- <u>UNC Campus Connections –</u>
 <u>Youth Mentoring</u>: Pairs UNC
 students as mentors with local
 community youth to develop
 goals and provide academic
 support, career planning and
 positive social skill development.

Connect Your Loved One with Support

If your loved one is struggling with loneliness, isolation, or unhealthy relationships, connect them with support like counselors, teachers, and health care providers who can offer guidance and help.

- North Range Behavioral Health offers mental health services that can help children, teens, aging adults, and families strengthen their wellbeing. This support can help children and teens build skills for processing feelings and environments that promote positive mental health.
- <u>Senior Peer Counseling</u> through North Range Behavioral Health offers no-cost support to aging adults. Counselors are 55 years old or older, schedule visits in the privacy of your home or assisted living facility, and offer support at no-cost. Visit NorthRange.org to learn more.
- <u>IMatterColorado</u> connects youth with a therapist for up to 6 free virtual counseling sessions (some in-person appointments available, too) that are completely confidential. Talking with someone can make you feel better.

Resources for Caregivers of Aging Adults

- **AARP's Caregiving Resources:** Provides informational guides on specialized care, coping with the responsibility of caregiving, and how to support caregivers.
- <u>AARP's Online Caregiving Community Forum</u>: Inspire others and make a difference
- **AARP's Friendly Voice program:** Talk to a friendly voice by dialing 1-888-281-0145 and leave your information to request a call from a trained volunteer.
- <u>Administration for Community Living Commit to Connect webpage</u>: Offers even more connection ideas and resources.
- <u>Adult Children of Aging Parents:</u> Provides information, referrals and support to ensure quality care of the nation's growing elderly population.
- <u>ALZConnected's Discussion Boards for Caregivers:</u> Connect with other caregivers and share answers, opinions, ideas and support.
- <u>Colorado caregiver support group:</u> Find a mutually supportive caregiving community
- **<u>Dementia Together:</u>** Helps people impacted by dementia to live well through connections, programs, coaching, and support groups.
- <u>Family Caregiver Alliance</u>: Explore webinars, self-help articles, and expert advice on topics such as Caregiving 101 to specialty areas like LGBTQ+ Caregivers or caring for veterans.
- <u>National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC)</u>: Works to improve the lives of families, caregivers and care recipients by bringing the importance of caregiving to the forefront of public awareness. Browse various guidebooks intended to improve the caregiving experience.
- Red Cross Caregiver Peer Support Groups, Chats, and Workshops: Hosts events, activities, conferences, retreats, camps, training and webinars of, by and for military and veteran caregivers. Caregivers from all eras are welcome to attend.
- <u>SAGE National LGBT Elder Hotline:</u> If you are an LGBT elder or care for one, call 877-360-LGBT(5428) to connect to a LGBT responder who is certified, friendly, and ready to listen and offer support. The hotline is free and available 24/7 in English and Spanish, with translation in 180 languages.
- <u>Weld County's Area Agency on Aging:</u> Offers resources for older adults (60+) and their family caregivers.









The Acts of Connection pledge is a way individuals and organizations can show their support and commitment to ending loneliness and social isolation in Weld County.

As an individual, you can pledge to create connection with the people around you. When you pledge, you agree to do your best to:

- · Reach out and include others.
- Be a good listener and a caring friend.
- Help people feel welcome and valued.
- Stand up against loneliness and isolation.
- Connect with those around you.
- Share your time and kindness.
- Work together to make our community a place where everyone feels like they belong.
- Help build strong and meaningful connections so no one feels alone.

Pledge today by visiting ActsofConnectionWeld.org











In Weld County, we take care of each other.

Commit to making Weld County a more connected, friendly place where we reach out to our neighbors and make sure everyone has a friend to turn to.

Visit ActsofConnectionWeld.org to learn more.



Learn

Learn the impacts of social isolation and loneliness.



Connect

Connect to resources to combat loneliness and build connection.



Pledge to cultivate a community of connection.