



MOVEMENT CONNECTION

Seeing & Being Seen

RESOURCE FOR
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INSTRUCTORS



Connection Begins with Subtle Movement

WHAT ROLE DOES CONNECTION PLAY IN YOUR MOVEMENT EXPERIENCE?

When we think about movement, we often imagine activities that raise our heart rate:

- walking
- exercising
- dancing
- swimming
- playing sports
- stretching

But some of the most important movements in our lives happen long before we begin exercising. Think about what happens when we connect with another person.

We might:

- look up and make eye contact
- smile
- wave
- lean toward someone
- open our posture
- step aside to make room for another person
- turn toward someone to listen attentively

Although small in magnitude, the impact of changing our relative body positions can be big. These are movements may not raise our heart rate, but they often touch our hearts.

Our bodies continuously communicate messages such as:

"I see you."

"You are welcome."

"I am interested."

"You belong here."

When these invitations are received in a group physical activity context, movement experiences often become more enjoyable, meaningful, and sustainable.



Connection Begins with Subtle Movement

WHAT ROLE DOES CONNECTION PLAY IN YOUR MOVEMENT EXPERIENCE?

Many people say they join activities because of the health benefits. Yet when asked why they return, they often talk about:

- familiar faces
- friendships
- welcoming instructors
- shared routines
- feeling remembered
- feeling missed when absent
- a sense of belonging

As one participant in our InterActive for Life research shared:

I found a social connection in the exercise class was the best in the beginning, because you always see so many different people and say hi to them.

This feeling of being seen lingers well beyond the beginning of class. Meaningful connection develops when people notice who is not there.

When regular participants return to a class they hear

Where were you? We missed you. It's so nice to have you back in class.

Connection is not something that only happens after movement.

Connection is something we can actively create. For more examples see the YouTube video: ["Joy in Active Aging"](#)

Connection Challenge

The next time you participate in an activity, ask yourself:

"What helps me feel seen?"

Then ask:

"What can I do to help someone else feel seen?"



Instructor Activities

TO INSPIRE MOVEMENT CONNECTION

1

The First Five Minutes Matter

Observe what happens before movement begins.

Notice:

- Who is greeted?
- Who is standing alone?
- Who looks uncertain?
- Who already knows people?
- Who may need help feeling welcome?

Challenge

Create at least three intentional moments of welcome before the activity begins. Examples:

- Greet participants personally.
- Introduce people to one another.
- Welcome newcomers.
- Create opportunities for conversation.

Reflection

Reflect on one of your intentional moments of welcome. What worked? What might you refine for next time?

Instructor Activities

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2 Learn and Use Names

Names help people feel seen.

Challenge

Learn one new participant name each session.

To help remember names:

- Repeat the name when you first hear it.
- Use the person's name during a conversation.
- Connect the name to something you learned about them.
- Use the name again before they leave.
- Write a brief note after the session if that helps you remember.

For example:

"Welcome, Maria."

"How did you enjoy the activity today, Maria?"

"See you next week, Maria."

The more times a name is used, the more likely it is to stick.

Remember, learning names is like learning movement—it improves with practice.

Use Names During:

- greetings
- attendance
- encouragement
- introductions
- recognition
- celebrations



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2 Learn and Use Names

Reflection

How does the atmosphere change when participants are known by name?

How might a participant feel when they hear:

"I'm glad you're here, Maria."

instead of:

"Glad you came."

InterActive for Life Tip

A remembered name is one of the simplest ways to help someone feel:

- Seen
- Welcomed
- Included
- Valued

People may forget what activity they did, but they rarely forget how it felt to be recognized.



Instructor Activities

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3 Make Attendance About Belonging

Attendance is more than record keeping.
It is an opportunity to communicate:

"Your presence matters."

Examples:

- "I'm glad you're here."
- "Good to see you."
- "Welcome back."
- "We missed you last week."

Reflection

How might participants feel when someone notices their presence?



Instructor Activities

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4

Create Opportunities to See and Be Seen

Connection rarely happens by accident. Let's build it into our activities!

Challenge

Create opportunities for participants to:

- pair up
- introduce themselves
- encourage one another
- share experiences
- celebrate successes
- move together

Build Connection into the Movement

Connection does not always require conversation.

Sometimes the movement itself becomes the connection.

Consider how an existing movement in the activity you are leading might become more interactive:

- can a pushing action like a push-up become a chest pass?
- can participants be encouraged to mirror a partner?
- can a movement challenge include complexity by adding conversation?
- can participants make eye contact while moving?

In some activities, connection is created through shared attention, timing, rhythm, and responsiveness. A meaningful connection can occur without saying a word.



Instructor Activities

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4

Create Opportunities to See and Be Seen

Tip for Facilitating Small Groups

When using partners or small groups, keep prompts simple and purposeful.

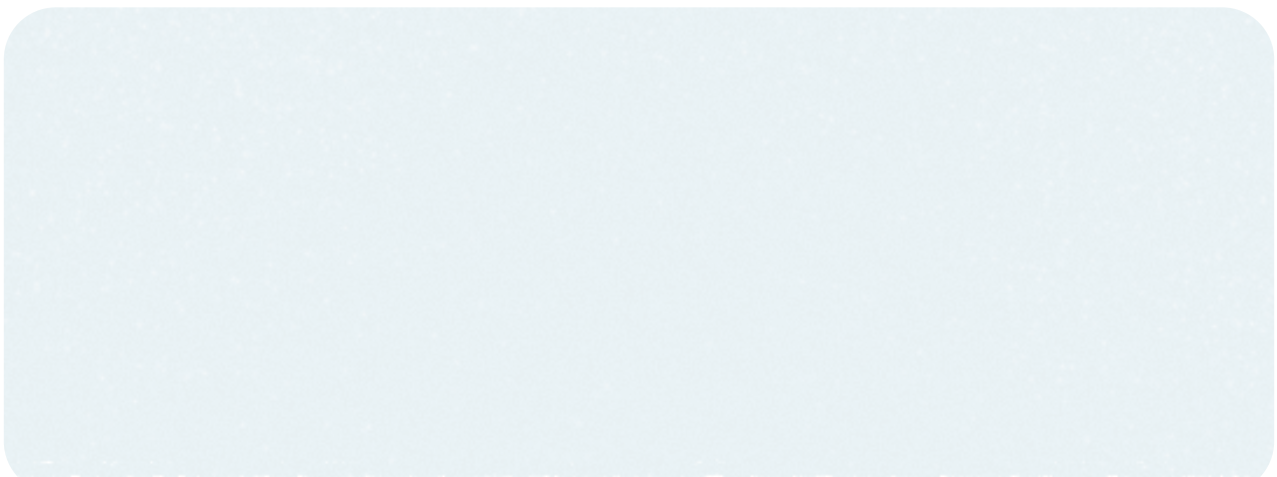
Examples:

- Share one thing you enjoy about movement.
- Introduce yourself to someone new.
- Share a recent success or challenge.

Aim for groups of 2–4 people so everyone has an opportunity to participate. Occasionally encourage participants to connect with someone they do not already know.

Reflection

- How did participants respond?
- Did connection emerge through conversation, movement, or both?
- Did participants have opportunities to both see others and be seen themselves?
- What might you do next time to strengthen connection through movement?



Instructor Activities

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5 Notice Who Might Be Invisible

Pay attention to participants who:

- remain on the edges
- rarely speak
- arrive alone
- leave immediately
- avoid eye contact

Challenge

Help one person feel seen today.

You might:

- learn their name
- greet them personally
- introduce them to another participant
- acknowledge a contribution



Instructor Activities

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6 Notice What You Praise

Do participants only receive praise for:

- performance?
- effort?
- achievement?

Or do they also receive recognition for:

- welcoming others?
- encouraging others?
- kindness?
- teamwork?
- creating connection?

Inclusive Praise Examples

- "Thank you for helping someone feel welcome."
- "I noticed you introducing yourself."
- "I appreciate the way you included others."
- "Thank you for encouraging your partner."
- "You helped create a positive atmosphere."
- "I appreciate how this group looks out for one another."



Instructor Activities

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7

Create a Culture of Recognition

Ask yourself:

"How will participants know they matter here?"

Examples:

- greeting people by name
- celebrating attendance
- remembering preferences
- welcoming newcomers
- recognizing contributions
- facilitating introductions

Challenge

Choose one way to strengthen belonging this week.





Instructor Tips

FOR MOVEMENT CONNECTION

Tip #1: Connection Is Movement

Eye contact, smiles, greetings, gestures, listening, and welcoming are all movements that support human connection.

Tip #2: Connection Happens Before the Activity Begins

Many participants decide whether they belong before the first movement even starts.

Tip #3: Structure Matters

If connection is important, create opportunities for it. Do not assume it will happen on its own.

Tip #4: Introductions Matter

Helping people learn names can be one of the most powerful things an instructor does.

Tip #5: Help Participants Expand Their Circles

Encourage people to connect with someone new. New relationships help communities grow stronger.

InterActive For Life

REMINDER

- Connection is not something that happens beside movement.
- Connection is something we move to create.
- Every smile, every greeting, every wave, every introduction, every act of recognition
- is a movement toward another human being.

Key Takeaway

People may come for the activity.

But they often return because they feel seen.

When people feel noticed, acknowledged, and valued, movement becomes more than an activity.

It becomes a place of belonging.

Congratulations!

You have explored ways to:

- ✓ Notice opportunities for connection
- ✓ Help others feel seen
- ✓ Allow yourself to be seen
- ✓ Build new friendships and relationships
- ✓ Create belonging through movement
- ✓ Strengthen community one interaction at a time

InterActive for Life Reminder

NOTICE. ACKNOWLEDGE. CONNECT.

Say hello.

Learn a new name.

Let yourself be seen.

Help someone else feel seen.

Create movement that connects hearts as well as bodies.

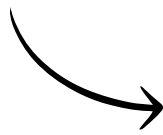
Connection is movement.





Curious for more?

- [Quick tips for physical activity participants](#)
- [Complete the InterActive for Life Inventory](#)



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