

# Update of *Completely Connected*

The book, *Completely Connected*, was published in 2015. Since then, the Connection Practice has continued to evolve. The most significant changes are described below.

## **The Connection Practice Definition:**

The Connection Practice was defined in a variety of ways in the book and the definition has evolved over the years. The definition that fits best is:

The Connection Practice is a wellness habit that unites empathy and insight to meet challenges in life. It transforms turmoil into caring connection with self and others.

The Connection Practice is also a proven path for moving from loneliness to an emotionally safe relationship with yourself and with others.

The essence of the Connection Practice: empathy + insight = connection

## **Chapter 4: Empathy + Insight = Connection (page 75)**

On pages 76-78, the Connection Practice activities are described as:

1. The Connection Process
2. The Connection Path
3. Connection Mediation

We changed the name of the first activity to “the Connection Practice” since it’s the basic practice. Whenever the name is shown as the Connection “Process” in the book, it is now known as the Connection “Practice.”

On pages 99-100, the science behind the Connection Practice is summarized. More research has been discovered and a new summary is provided below:

### **1. Naming feelings reduces the reaction of the amygdala.**

In a UCLA research study called *Putting Feelings into Words*, 30 participants were shown photographs of people who were emotionally upset, and then were asked to label the emotion (for example, “angry”) while the researchers measured the response of their amygdalae. The researchers found that naming the feelings in this way reduced the amygdala’s response.

In a control group, the participants looked at faces and selected a name underneath them that corresponded to the person's gender, like "Harry" or "Sally" while the researchers measured the response of their amygdalae. The researchers discovered that the amygdala – the part of the brain that sounds an alarm in time of danger – was *less* active when an emotion label was attached to the upset face, compared to when a name was attached. This leads us to believe that when the amygdala has been triggered, naming feelings reduces its reaction. Naming feelings is the first step in the Connection Practice.

Source: *Putting Feelings Into Words: Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli*

Matthew D. Lieberman, Naomi I. Eisenberger, Molly J. Crockett, Sabrina M. Tom, Jennifer H. Pfeifer and Baldwin M. Way

*Association for Psychological Science*, Volume 18 – Number 5, p. 421-428

## **2. Naming needs leads to cognitive empathy.**

Cognitive empathy includes perspective taking which has been shown to increase empathic concern. Empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, **needs** and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes pro-social behavior. This capacity requires an interplay of neural networks and enables us to perceive the emotions of others, resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between our own and others' emotions.

Research in the neurobiology of empathy has changed the perception of empathy from a soft skill to a neurobiologically based competency. A cardinal feature of empathy is that it usually helps connect people to others. Because of the evolutionary development of this brain-based capacity, affective empathy, or emotional sharing, most easily occurs among members of the same "tribe". Individuals tend to have the most empathy for others who look or act like them, for others who have suffered in a similar way, or for those who share a common goal. We see these biases play out repeatedly in communities, schools, sports teams, and religious communities.

All perceptions in our environment are routed through the thalamus. From there, the amygdala, the threat sensor in the brain, reacts to threats, unfamiliar stimuli, conditioned fears, and perceived threats in as few as 50 milliseconds long before conscious thoughts come into play. When these threat signals reach the midbrain, (specifically in the area of the pons) automatic reactions such as the fight, flight or freeze response take place unless there is cognitive input from executive functions in the prefrontal cortex.

Because of this evolutionary bias, *cognitive empathy* must play a role when a lack of emotional empathy exists because of racial, ethnic, religious, or physical differences. Important research on empathy and altruism has demonstrated that enhancing perspective taking, the capacity to see a person's situation

from his or her point of view, coupled with enhanced value being placed on the welfare of those who are unfamiliar can override bias.

In an interesting study, Batson explored the relationship of perspective-taking to valuing a person who is in need. Perspective taking is a well-known precursor to empathic concern. In the first experiment, both perspective taking and valuing were variables and each increased empathic concern independently.

In the Connection Practice, when we guess another's needs, we are employing cognitive empathy in an attempt to take that person's perspective. Building the skill of guessing needs is at the heart of the Connection Practice.

Source: *The Science of Empathy*, Helen Riess, MD, *Journal of Patient Experience*, June 2017 4 (2): 74-77

### **3. Heart-brain coherence helps extinguish the irrational reactions of the amygdala and leads to insight.**

Research from the HeartMath Institute explains the impact of coherence on the amygdala and how it establishes a new baseline of response.

Source: HeartMath Institute (2015) *Science of the Heart: Exploring the role of the heart in human performance*. Volume 2, Chapter 5: Establishing a new baseline, 29-35.

Also *A Brain Mechanism for Facilitation of Insight by Positive Affect* showed that people in a better mood are more likely to solve problems by insight. Research demonstrated that self-reported positive affect of participants uniquely increased insight before and during the solving of a problem, as indicated by differing brain activity patterns. People experiencing anxiety showed the opposite effect, and solved fewer problems by insight.

Heart-brain coherence changes an individual's mood to one of positive affect, which results in the insights that are discovered in the last step of the Connection Practice.

Source: *A Brain Mechanism for Facilitation of Insight by Positive Affect*,

Karuna Subramaniam, John Kounios, Todd B Parrish and Mark Jung-Beeman

*Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, Volume 21, number 3, p. 414-432

In addition, we now address the brain's neuroplasticity, which makes it possible to form and reorganize synaptic connections so we can heal from trauma and change our responses.

We also expand on our understanding of the amygdala. In Sarah Peyton's book, *Your Resonant Self* (page 26) states: *When a person is awake, the amygdala is participating in full brain waves of energy that occur twelve to one times a second, essentially asking the questions, "Am I safe, do I matter? Am I safe, do I matter?"*

The Connection Practice sends a clear message “You are safe, and you do matter.” This makes it easier to clear negative feelings and access our best thinking.

However, the brain tends to discount experiences unless they become a pattern. Consequently, the Connection Practice is most effective when it becomes a habit.

### **Chapter 6: Creating Connection at School and at Home (page 125)**

On pages 130-137, the Connection Process Game and the Connection Practice Curriculum for students are described. Those have been replaced by Connection Practice Boards and a Curriculum that uses the Boards for the six lessons.



### **Chapter 8: The BePeace Practice (pages 175-189)**

The name “BePeace” is no longer used because the method was the same as the Connection Practice and having two names was creating unnecessary confusion. Now the Connection Practice is presented to faith-based communities in the same way as other groups.

### **Get Started Connecting Today (pages 175-189)**

Most of the information in this section has evolved, including the name of the website, which is now [www.ConnectionPractice.org](http://www.ConnectionPractice.org). Please check the website for the most up-to-date information on Connection Practice coaching and courses.

On page 215, you are invited to use a Connection Practice Daily Workbook to “get the habit going.” Now, we also offer Connection Practice Boards, which work for people of all ages, but must be purchased with instruction through a course or coaching.

Connection Circles are another way for graduates of Connection Practice courses or coaching to continue practicing and support each other’s learning. These regular meetings are facilitated by a Connection Practice Trainer.

Many people want to become a Connection Practice Coach or Trainer. The description of the Professional Training Track on page 219 is outdated. An update of the Training Track can be found at [www.ConnectionPractice.org](http://www.ConnectionPractice.org).

For further information or support in getting started, write [info@ConnectionPractice.org](mailto:info@ConnectionPractice.org).