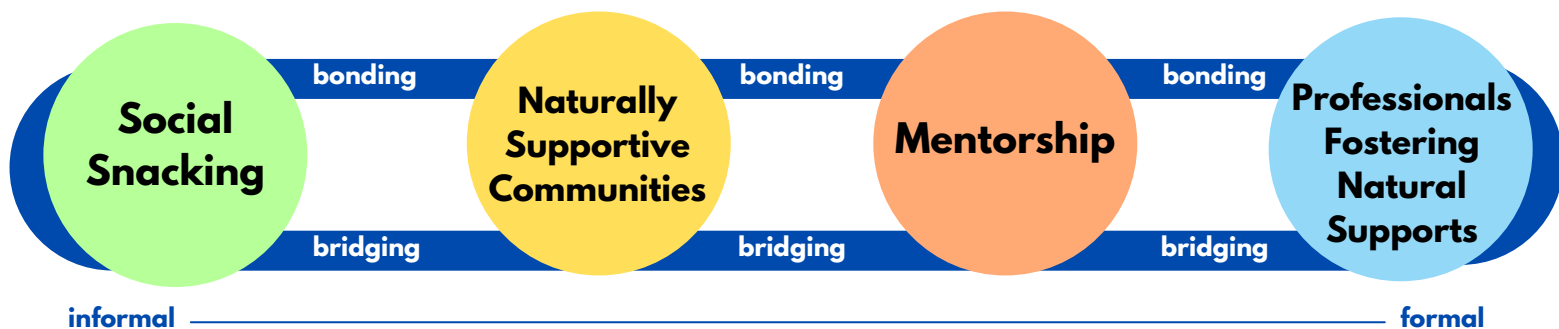


Natural Supports



Common Language

Natural Supports

Natural Supports are mutually beneficial relationships that include close connections, such as family and friends, and broader connections such as neighbours, coaches, community organizations and local businesses. (www.connectionsfirst.ca)

Social Snacking

Social snacks are brief and informal positive interactions in daily events, which contribute to happiness, sense of belonging and identity, and help to build naturally supportive communities. Examples: chatting with your barista, saying hello to someone at the bus stop, or complimenting your neighbour's garden. (www.connectionsfirst.ca/social-snacking-toolkit)

Naturally Supportive Communities

Naturally supportive communities are comprised of individuals, organizations, groups, businesses and others who help each other achieve a sense of belonging and connectedness. People who live in naturally supportive communities may be better able to cope with the stress of daily living. (Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy). [Click here to view the Guide to Building Naturally Supportive Communities.](#)

Mentorship/Mentoring

Mentoring is the presence of a caring individual who provides a young person with support, advice, friendship, reinforcement, and constructive role modelling over time. Mentoring can take many different forms, including formal mentoring programs, coaching, youth groups, scout leaders and more. (https://albertamentors.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/AboutMentoring_CommonDefs.pdf.)

Professionals Facilitating Natural Supports

This term refers to any formal intervention that involves a professional working with their client to foster long term well-being and success, including through the development of natural support networks. Professionals may help clients to identify and reconnect with their natural supports.

Natural Supports Practice Framework

The Framework provides a set of principles and practices to support those working with vulnerable youth. The purpose is to strengthen the practice of youth-serving organizations so that they help at-risk youth to identify, strengthen and extend their social networks. ([Working with Vulnerable Youth to Enhance their Natural Supports: A Practice Framework](#))

Bonding and Bridging Supports

The literature distinguishes between two kinds of natural supports: bridging and bonding relationships.

Bonding supports are the strong ties we have with people who share a similar identity, history and/or background. These relationships connect us in a very compelling way, and give us a sense of belonging and security.

Bridging ties are weaker – but they're critical because they bring some diversity to our networks. Bridging ties such as mentors, teachers, and coaches help people connect to information and resources beyond what's available within their immediate group. For example, a coach who helps with the university application process might be an important bridging support, particularly if no one else in the youth's social network has ever attended post-secondary. Sometimes these bridging supports are facilitated by professionals rather than developing naturally (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters might connect a young person with a volunteer mentor), but natural mentors can also play a bridging role. ([Working with Vulnerable Youth to Enhance their Natural Supports: A Practice Framework](#))

Another way of looking at natural supports is by the type of relationship we have with those with whom we are connected. Natural supports differ by the strength of the relationship developed as well as by the function the relationship serves, with the understanding that relationships may become more or less influential over time. Connections can be forged through shared geography (like someone living in your neighbourhood) or through shared interest (like someone in your book club). Connections at all levels are mutually beneficial.

One to one connections provide the most impactful relationships as they occur at the individual level. These relationships provide a child or youth with a sense of identity, belonging, security, social norms, attachment, stability and self esteem. For example, they typically include relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, friends, teachers, and mentors.

Group connections are developed through association with a group, environment, or through participation in an activity. These relationships are weaker but critical because they function to bring new ideas, ways of doing things and access to information and resources beyond the child's or youth's immediate group. For example, these could include relationships with classmates, co-workers, people within your faith-based organization, or teammates.

The broadest type of connections occur at the **community** level and are those formed between members who belong to the same community. Connections or networks developed at the community level enable its members to benefit from a naturally supportive environment, as well as contribute to instilling a naturally supportive culture within their community. For example, your bus driver, local grocery store owner, or hairdresser might all be community connections. (Middle Years, Out of School Time Draft Framework)