



"Safety is not the absence of threat. It is the presence of connection."

March invites us outward.

As the days get longer and routines settle in, this is often the point where stress becomes quieter — but heavier. Deadlines continue. Responsibilities remain. And without realizing it, many of us begin to handle it alone.

This month's Healthy By Choice focus is Connection, built around a powerful truth: we are not meant to regulate stress in isolation.

Not in a "be more social" way. More like: let's understand how the nervous system actually works — and why safety, belonging, and shared presence are biological needs.

Connection isn't a personality trait. It's protective physiology. When we feel seen, supported, and psychologically safe, the body shifts out of defense and into regulation. Focus improves. Collaboration strengthens. Recovery becomes possible.

Throughout this issue, you'll find research-backed insights, practical tools, and small practices designed to strengthen connection in realistic ways — without adding pressure or more to your plate.

This isn't about forcing interaction. It's about reinforcing the conditions that help your system function at its best.

In This Issue, You'll Find:

- Why connection impacts mental and physical health
- Insights from Polyvagal Theory and neuroscience
- A 5-day Connection Reset challenge
- A practical workshop on co-regulation
- Community wellness events and engagement opportunities
- A fresh, spring-inspired recipe made for sharing

Take a breath.
Look around.
Resilience works better together.

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Why Connection Matters for Mental and Physical Health

The biology of belonging — and why your nervous system depends on it.

Connection is often treated like a “nice to have” — a bonus, a personality preference, something social. But biologically, connection is survival. The human nervous system is not wired for independence; it is wired for co-regulation, meaning your body functions better when it feels safe with others. That isn't poetic language. It's physiology.



The Brain on Connection

Neuroscience research shows that meaningful connection activates the ventral vagal system — the part of the nervous system responsible for safety, calm, and social engagement. When we feel connected, cortisol levels decrease, heart rate stabilizes, inflammation lowers, immune function improves, and emotional regulation strengthens. In contrast, chronic loneliness activates the same stress pathways as physical danger. Prolonged social isolation has been linked to increased risk of anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, sleep disruption, weakened immunity, and even cognitive decline. Connection is not emotional fluff. It is protective biology.

Loneliness Is a Health Risk — Even at Work

You can be surrounded by people and still feel disconnected. Workplace loneliness has been associated with higher burnout rates, reduced performance, lower creativity, increased absenteeism, and decreased engagement. When employees feel psychologically safe and supported, productivity improves — not because pressure increases, but because the nervous system shifts from defense to collaboration. Safety fuels performance.

Co-Regulation: The Skill We Don't Talk About

Co-regulation means our nervous systems influence one another. A calm presence can lower another person's stress response, while a tense environment can elevate everyone's heart rate. We do not regulate in isolation. A simple conversation, eye contact, shared laughter, or feeling understood can physically reduce stress in the body. Connection is not about being extroverted — it's about feeling seen.



Connection Is a Biological Need, Not a Social Luxury

Dr. Stephen Porges, neuroscientist and founder of Polyvagal Theory, transformed how we understand stress by showing that the nervous system is not simply wired for fight or flight. It is wired first for safety — and safety is detected through relationship.

For decades, stress research focused primarily on survival responses: fight, flight, or freeze. Dr. Porges' work expanded that model by identifying a third state — social engagement — governed by the ventral vagal branch of the vagus nerve. This system connects the brain to the heart, lungs, and digestive system, and plays a central role in emotional regulation, facial expression, vocal tone, and our ability to connect with others.

When we perceive cues of safety — warm tone of voice, steady eye contact, relaxed facial expression, respectful communication — the ventral vagal system activates. In this state, heart rate stabilizes, breathing deepens, digestion improves, inflammation lowers, and cognitive flexibility increases. We are biologically more capable of collaboration, empathy, and clear decision-making.

But when safety feels uncertain — even subtly — the body shifts toward protection. Stress hormones rise, focus narrows, and energy diverts away from growth and toward defense. Over time, living in this defensive state can impact both mental and physical health.



Through a process he calls neuroception, the nervous system constantly scans for safety or danger outside of conscious awareness. This means our bodies react to relational environments before our thoughts catch up. We may believe we are “fine,” while our physiology tells a different story.

Dr. Porges emphasizes that regulation is relational. We return to balance not only through individual coping strategies, but through co-regulation — steady presence, psychological safety, and supportive connection. Even small moments of attuned interaction can shift the nervous system toward calm.

Research in biological psychology and trauma-informed neuroscience continues to expand on these findings, reinforcing the critical role connection plays in long-term mental and physical health. The implications extend beyond personal well-being: environments that foster psychological safety support better communication, stronger teamwork, and more sustainable performance.

Resilience, from this perspective, is not just personal toughness. It is the capacity to return to safety — and connection is one of the fastest pathways back.

Learn More

- Porges, S. W. (2007). *The Polyvagal Perspective*. *Biological Psychology*, 74(2), 116–143.
- Porges, S. W. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*.
- Porges, S. W. (2021). *Polyvagal Safety*.
- Polyvagal Institute: www.polyvagalinstitute.org



TIPS & RESOURCES: **Connection in Action:** Small Practices That Regulate the Nervous System

Connection strengthens resilience in small, consistent ways. It doesn't require more meetings or more social events — it requires moments that signal safety to the nervous system.

Start by noticing where you felt even slightly seen today — a supportive comment, shared laugh, or brief check-in. The brain responds to quality, not quantity.

Reach out intentionally to one person this week. A short message of appreciation or a five-minute conversation can shift both nervous systems toward calm.

If stress is high, resist automatic isolation. Walk with a colleague, sit beside someone while working, or engage in a quick team interaction. Co-regulation works quietly and effectively.

Small cues of respect, steady tone, and active listening create psychological safety — and safety fuels collaboration.



EMPLOYEE PERKS – TICKETSATWORK:

Daily Support That Meets You Where You Are

Looking for an easy, private way to build emotional resilience? Cope Notes delivers one daily text designed to support healthier thinking, reflection, and stress management.

Each message includes a psychology insight, journaling prompt, or practical exercise written by real people navigating real challenges. It's simple, anonymous, and requires no appointments or insurance.

- Daily peer-supported encouragement
- Unlimited journaling access
- Secure and confidential

Use code **EBG** to save 20% on any subscription.

EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS



Gainesville Chamber Chase 5K - Mar 19

All Locations & Remote

Power Walks
Benefits Open Enrollment - Mar 4 - 13
HBC | The Connection Rest Workshop - Mar 20

TEAM COACHING GROUPS



Pillar #3 Connection

Connection as Regulation: Why We're Not Meant to Do This Alone

This month's anchor workshop explores how stress can quietly lead to isolation — and why connection is essential for nervous system regulation.

In this interactive session, we'll look at how relational safety supports resilience and share one simple weekly practice you can use to reconnect at work and in daily life.

Education. Reflection. Practical action.
Because resilience works better together.

Join FRI Mar 20 - 1:15 PM Session



WELLNESS CHALLENGES

Mini-Challenge: The Connection Reset

Duration: Mar 16- 20

Points Available: 250 points per day | 1,250 total

Spend 2-5 minutes each day engaging in small, intentional moments of connection. No pressure. No oversharing. Just awareness and support.

Daily Prompts

Day 1 – Notice:

Where did you feel even slightly seen today?

Day 2 – Reach:

Send one message of appreciation or encouragement.

Day 3 – Listen:

Give someone your full attention for five minutes.

Day 4 – Support:

Ask, “How can I support you this week?” — and listen.

Day 5 – Reflect:

Who helps you feel regulated and grounded? Why?

Connection helps restore balance and reduce the impact of stress — even in small doses.

SHARE YOUR WINS!



We want to celebrate YOU! Whether you’ve achieved a fitness goal, started a new healthy habit, or accomplished something personal, we’d love to hear about it. submit it [Here](#) or Email us at wellness@procarerx.com to have your story featured in our next newsletter.



A FEW NOTES TO REMEMBER

Participation in wellness activities, including fitness classes, coaching sessions, 5k and wellness walks, helps us continue to grow and improve our offerings.

You can find the PDF version of the Newsletter for printing at hbc.procarerx.com under resources or [Here](#)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

We couldn’t be more excited to celebrate our March birthdays! Your special birthday shout-out is [right here](#). Cheers to another fantastic year ahead!

CONNECTION

WORDSEARCH

B	E	L	O	N	I	N	G	Q	W	T	Y	R
P	M	R	E	G	U	L	A	T	I	O	N	E
L	P	C	O	N	N	E	C	T	I	O	N	S
S	A	F	E	T	Y	X	B	N	P	M	L	I
D	T	R	U	S	T	V	M	T	E	Q	P	L
X	H	Z	B	U	M	N	D	F	H	J	L	I
K	Y	J	Q	P	W	C	A	L	M	R	T	E
S	F	G	J	P	H	L	Y	W	Q	Z	X	N
X	V	B	C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	C
S	D	F	G	R	J	K	L	Q	W	R	T	E
X	L	I	S	T	E	N	I	N	G	Z	Q	M
E	M	P	A	T	H	Y	T	R	Y	Q	W	X
P	R	E	S	E	N	C	E	P	Q	Z	V	B

BELONGING
SUPPORT
SAFETY
RESILIENCE

REGULATION
COMMUNITY
EMPATHY
TRUST

PRESENCE
LISTENING
CALM
CONNECTION

Sunshine & Skewers

Grill. Gather. Repeat.

Spring is the season of fresh air, bright colors, and shared plates. These vibrant skewers are easy to prep, fun to grill, and perfect for bringing people together — whether it's family dinner, a backyard hangout, or just a Tuesday that needs more joy.

Ingredients: (Serves 4)

- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 red onion, chunked
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes
- 1 lb chicken breast or tofu cubes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt & pepper

Instructions:

1. Toss veggies and protein with olive oil, lemon juice, and seasoning.
2. Thread onto skewers (mix the colors — make it fun).
3. Grill 8–12 minutes, turning occasionally.
4. Serve warm and share generously.

Why We Love It:

- Colorful veggies support gut and immune health
- Protein + fiber help stabilize energy and mood
- Grilling invites connection (and less screen time)

Fresh flavors. Bright plates. Good company... *Because connection tastes better outside.*



Thank you for reading!

