

5 Ways To Feel More Connected In Your Home

9.17.14 - Shawna Hampton, *Love + Home Interior Design*

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." — African proverb

The need to feel like we belong, to feel like we matter, that we're part of something, that we're not alone is one basic human need we all have that is so important it affects our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being on every level.

I'd go so far as to say it's just as important as breathing, eating, drinking, and sleeping.

The connections I have to other people, especially my family and friends, nourish my spirit and recharge my soul. Feeling *connected* to the people we share our living space with is vitally important to almost everyone for the same reason.

In my work, I often hear women say **they want their family to function better, to have more fun, be relaxed, stop fighting so much, and create lots of good memories together.**

The key component to all of this is a strong sense of connection ...

If you want to feel more connected to your family and friends, here are 5 ways your home can help you ...

Make Eye Contact

Studies show that stronger, more affectionate, and more lasting connections occur between people when there is frequent eye contact.

How many of you currently have your living room furniture arranged so it all faces the television? (I see you, sheepishly raising your hand over there.)

Your opinion might differ, but I feel that the focal point of a room often reflects a family's or individual's priorities in life.

And, asking gently ... Would you rather place a priority on the latest season of *The Walking Dead*? Or on making eye contact and conversation with your spouse and kids? Learning about the latest celebrity breakup from ET? Or about your friend's biggest hopes and dreams?

Move that sofa! Consider arranging your living/hanging out space so there are at least two seating areas that face each other, such as two parallel sofas, or a large U-shaped sectional that allows people to sit across from each other.



Arranging two sofas parallel to each other fosters conversation, not TV watching.

Better yet, **put that television behind a cabinet that closes**, so when it's time to focus on connecting with the people in your life, it doesn't serve as a temptation and distraction.

One other suggestion: Get a round dining table. Round tables put everyone on "equal footing" in a conversation and allow for more free-flowing conversation and better eye contact with everyone seated there.



A round dining table (this one seats 8) is awesome for flowing conversation

Make It Comfy

When a person is relaxed, their heart rate decreases, they breathe more deeply, and they are more able to express themselves honestly and openly.

It's far more easy to relax in an environment full of soft textures and comfortable surfaces, rather than hard lines and flat areas.

When you're thinking about living or family room furniture, look for fabrics that are not only durable, but feel soft and smooth under your skin. **Consider sofa and chair cushions that allow you to sink**

down into them. Add large, fluffy throw pillows for support and extra softness.

And, **think about an upholstered ottoman** rather than a coffee table to encourage people to put their feet up and get comfy.

Also, here's an interesting trick: **Display a tea set with a teapot, cups, a pretty tin full of teas or hot chocolates, and a honey jar on a gorgeous tray in your kitchen.** Most people associate a cup of tea with comfort and will automatically register that your house is a great place to sit back, relax, and connect with you and your family when they see it.

Make Conversation

What's the best way to experience connection with someone? Have a conversation! **Talking and sharing are the fastest ways to learn all about a person, find common ground, and form and reinforce bonds.**

You're well on your way to helping people to talk to one another by promoting eye contact and comfort. But there are a few more things you can do to foster that important conversation.

Do you happen to be an introvert like me? **Introverts prefer one-on-one sharing over the free-wheeling, maybe loud, and perhaps disorganized but awesome fun of a group gab session.** Creating private nooks within larger conversation areas, like a window bench with a cushion, or two chairs facing each other off to the side of the main seating, gives the quieter individuals in your home the chance to unwind and have the low-key conversations that are so important to preserving their inner peace.



This awesome window bench in a kitchen would make an amazing place for people to sit while they talk with the cook.

Or perhaps you have a busy, busy, busy family and hardly ever have time to sit down and have full-on conversations. In that case, **create a message center** with chalkboard paint in your kitchen or on your garage door (somewhere that can be seen as people come and go). **Make it a habit to leave each other little notes** of love and encouragement as often as you can so they feel connected to you and to each other.

Make It Personal

So you've encouraged eye contact, made people comfortable, and made it easy for them to have a conversation. Now that everyone is gathered around and talking, **give them something to talk about and an opportunity to learn something about you and your family by displaying things that have a story or are meaningful to you in some way.**

Photos are an obvious, but still awesome, choice for this. But not just the photo studio shot of your entire family in a field all wearing blue. Put out shots of that amazing vacation to Florida. Or candid of your kids doing their goofiest impressions. Maybe even, if you have them, shots of your favorite architecture or beach. **Anything eye-catching and interesting enough to encourage a friend or acquaintance to ask what the photo's all about so you can tell your cool story.**



I took this photo of a couple kissing on the Piazza Navona on a trip to Rome ... one day I hope to have it enlarged and framed to hang on my wall. What a great story it will tell!

Mementos and curious objects are another fantastic story starter. Anything unusual, offbeat, that has a unique origin or tale behind how you came to own it ... gold for telling a person a lot about who you are and what you're about.

And, fingers crossed, that leads to them sharing a quirky story about this one time when they found this one thing ... **instant connection.**

Make It Easy

Connection, within a family or between new acquaintances or among lifelong friends, should be easy.

Do you feel most connected to your family when you're gathered around a table playing a raucous game of Monopoly? **Keep that board and any other games in an easy-to-reach place** so that when the mood strikes, everyone's ready.

Do you feel most connected when your friends show up at your door for an impromptu dinner party? (Bearing wine, of course.) **Put your party dishes and martini glasses in the most accessible cabinet in your kitchen** instead of tucked away in a buffet or another room.

Do your kids feel more connected to you when they can help you make dinner? If you have the space, **add a kid-height table** where they can mix things or do kid-friendly cooking activities. Or, if you're planning a kitchen remodel, even **consider adding a lower-height section of counter space** for this. It will get them involved AND keep them out from underfoot at the same time.



This kitchen features a lower-height bar surrounding the main prep area, perfect for kids to use as they "help"

All of the above will allow connection to flow spontaneously, which is how the most solid connections tend to form.

I'd love to hear from you! What special things do you do to feel connected to your family and friends, in your home or elsewhere? Do you have any special rituals that promote connection? Or places where you feel the most connected? If you'd like to share, I'd love to hear them ... leave a comment below.

