Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

1

Meaningful Connection in a Hyperconnected World

Mr. Chris Flack
Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

1

Opening Question

2

Can you name six close friends?

2

Opening Question

55%

Can you name six close friends?

3

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Opening Question

55% **27%**

Can you name six close friends?

4

Opening Question

1990s – TV series
"*Friends*"

Reflect on your own situation

5

Opening Question

How often do you feel lonely?

1/3 PEOPLE
have 6 close friends

6

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Opening Question

How often do you feel lonely?

75% of students
feel lonely

1/3 PEOPLE
feel lonely

7

Agenda 3

Goal; Move social wellbeing up the priority list

Social Wellbeing Awareness
- What is Loneliness
- Why it's important
- Change to environment / society, communications and work
- Relevance of Digital Tech / Hybrid
- Human connection over efficiency

Social Wellbeing Solutions
- Individual / Friendship / Collective

#neuroscience #psychology #biology

8

The IKEA Effect Study 4

Have you ever built something from IKEA or similar where you have to build the furniture yourself?

The IKEA effect study shows if we build furniture ourselves, that input or labour… **leads to love**

The same is true of our habits

We can introduce new solutions, however, until we understand and are involved with the "why" we are doing certain things it's unlikely those habits will stick

9

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Loneliness

5

- This talk is all about building and maintaining healthy connections, and so maintaining positive social wellbeing

I'd like you to think if you've ever been heartbroken

Heartache is a social pain, and it shows up in the DACC, **the same brain region as physical pain**

REAL PAIN

loneliness is a
**"subjective perception
of social isolation"**

Dr. Loneliness - John Caciopo

10

DEIB and a Framework for Belonging (IB)

6

Diversity — Equality — Inclusion ↔ Belonging

Unless we are our authentic selves and have a sense of belonging, we cannot be included

11

Connections

7

12

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Connections

Intimate Connection
(individual)

Being in a relationship but feeling you cannot talk to your partner

Struggling to be alone

13

Connections

Intimate Connection
(individual)

Relational Connection
(friendships)

Not having anyone to hang-out / be social with

14

Connections

Intimate Connection
(individual)

Relational Connection
(friendships)

Collective
(group)

Being at a concert on your own / being in a group chat and feeling like you don't belong

15

Connections

Intimate Connection
(individual)

Relational Connection
(friendships)

Collective
(group)

16

8

Why Am I Here?

17

Speaker's Reason for Being Here

9

UnPlug

18

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Common Misunderstandings   10

1) Loneliness can impact anyone

2) You can be lonely in a group

3) When lonely, your brain goes into self-preservation mode

19

Loneliness Loop   11

We protect ourselves and shut ourselves off from others

20

Loneliness Loop

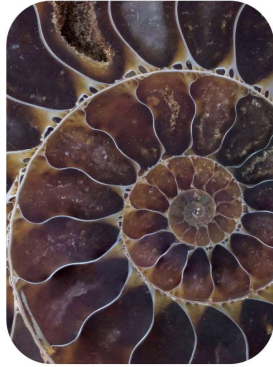**"Unchecked loneliness fuels continued loneliness by keeping us afraid to reach out"**

Brene Brown

21

Dangers of This Spiraling 12

Issues Compounding

- Paranoia, Anxiety, depression...
- More likely to find community and belonging in fractured groups

22

Loop Example 13

Friend drops out

Contact other friends – they cannot make it

Start to get paranoid and depressed

Don't contact anyone else

Don't go to the gig

On a loop…..

23

Quiz – What Is Loneliness 14

Complete the following;

SUBJECTIVE. perception of isolation

When we are chronically lonely typically, we go into SELF-PRESERVATION mode

24

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Impact of Social Connection – Individual   15

Let's talk about the good news

"If we get it right,
human connection is our superpower"
Matt Lieberman

25

Impact of Social Connection – Individual

- #1 best predictor of life satisfaction/physical/ psychological health
- Multiple studies have shown that social connection means we age slower, cancer is less deadly and Alzheimer's advances slower

University of California study of women with breast cancer
Those with a large network of friends were four times as likely to survive

26

Impact of Social Connection – Work   16

- Social isolation and loneliness cost employers more than $154 billion annually in stress-related absenteeism

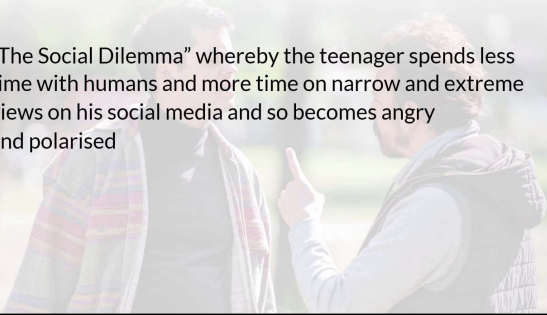**Increased job performance**
Decreased sick days
High job retention

27

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

HSTalks

Impact of Social Connection – Society   17

Polarisation

- "The Social Dilemma" whereby the teenager spends less time with humans and more time on narrow and extreme views on his social media and so becomes angry and polarised

28

How Did We Get Here?
Social Wiring   18

29

How Did We Get Here?
Social Wiring

Loneliness is a bodily function, **just like hunger**

- Hunger makes you pay attention to your physical needs
- Loneliness makes you pay attention to your social needs

30

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

HSTalks

How Did We Get Here?
Social Wiring

31

19

UnPlug

32

Change throughout the Years 20

Since then, we have largely moved **from collective societies based on agriculture to individualistic societies working in industry**

10%

ALONE IN CITIES

33

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Change throughout the Years

Since then, we have largely moved **from collective societies based on agriculture to individualistic societies working in industry**

1950   2014

22%   **50%**

SINGLE PEOPLE IN SOCIETY

34

Stone Age Bodies in a Space Age World

21

Freeze

Fight / Flight

Social Engagement

Previously in most cases, our collective society would have helped this by co-regulating our nervous system - sharing the burden

35

Stone Age Bodies in a Space Age World
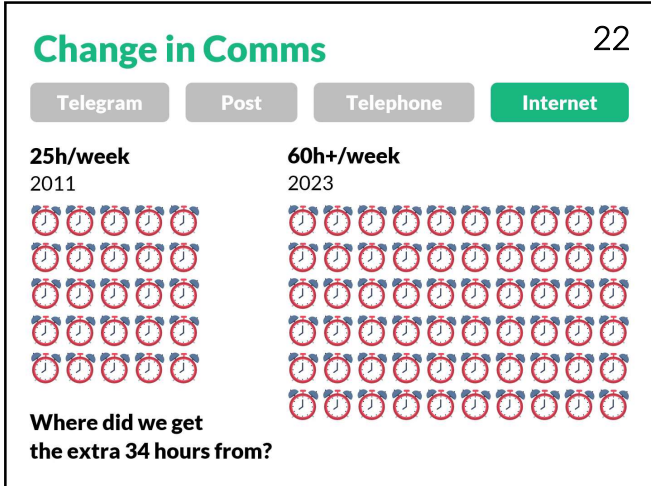
We need to cooperate

Harder to get these

- Intimate Connection (individual)
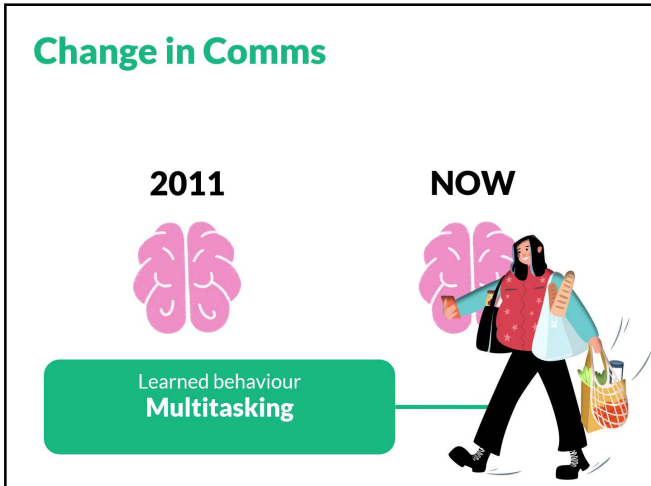- Relational Connection (friendships)
- Collective (group)

36

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Change in Comms   22

Telegram   Post   Telephone   **Internet**

25h/week
2011

60h+/week
2023

Where did we get the extra 34 hours from?

37

Change in Comms

2011   **NOW**

Learned behaviour
Multitasking

38

Change in Comms

2011   **NOW**
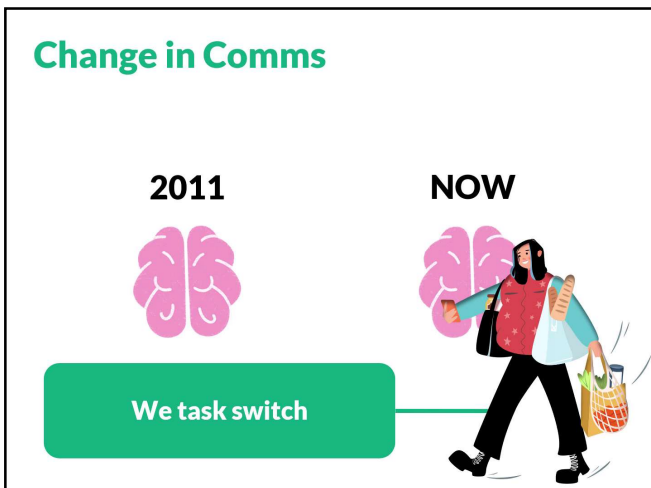
We task switch

39

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

HSTalks

Task Switching - The Impact

23

iPhone Effect Study

Mere presence of a device
= impact on IQ and EQ

Micro-social fragmentations
= prefer text over talk

Horizontal relationships (vs vertical – Dunbar's number)

See HS Talks "Digital Wellbeing in an Always-On World"

40

Ghosting/Zeigarnik Effect

24

We are happy to reciprocate messages

With digital technology this continuous effect can be overwhelming

Ghosting is stopping reciprocity

It is now ubiquitous across society

- We like closed loops
- The Zeigarnik effect is similar to cliffhangers
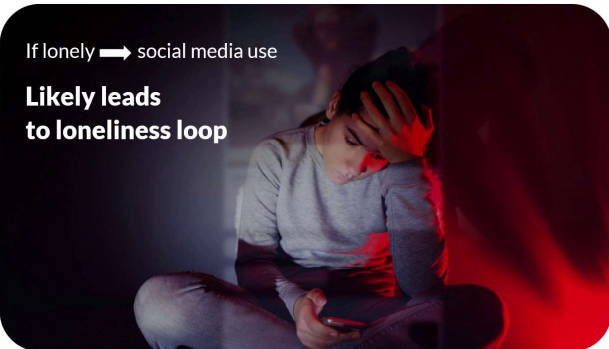- Ghosting causes an unhealthy disruption to this

41

Social Media

25

If lonely ➡ social media use

Likely leads to loneliness loop

42

Mr. Chris Flack – Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Change in Working

26

43

Change in Working

The Atlantic

"Before the pandemic, the office served for many as the last physical community left, especially as church attendance and association membership declined. But now, even our office relationships are being dispersed"

Derek Thompson, 2021

44

In-Person vs Screens

27

Whilst technology was a critical tool in enabling us to cope, work, and educate our children during the COVID-19 lockdowns, our brains became even more used to that platform

However, the research shows that **screens** are for communication/ transactional chats and **in-person** is best for connection and meaningful chats

45

In-Person vs Screens

"Neuroscience research has found that only in-person interactions trigger the full suite of physiological responses and neural synchronisation required for optimal human communication and trust, and that digital channels such as video conferencing disrupt our process of communicative information"

MIT Sloan Management Review Summer 22

Knight, C., Olaru, D., Lee, J.-A., & Parker, S. (2022, May 2). MIT Sloan Management Review. Link in the Links tab

46

In-Person vs Screens

- Collective Effervescence

- Polyvagal theory

- Social Baseline theory

**HUMAN
CONNECTION
OVER
EFFICIENCY**

47

Quiz – Impact of Social Wellbeing 28

Complete the following;

University of California study of women with breast cancer. **Those with a large network of friends were** FOUR. **times as likely to survive**

Workplace benefits improved productivity, staff wellbeing and RETENTION

A new habit that impacts how we connect is TASK SWITCHING

48

HSTalks

Mr. Chris Flack – Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Solutions   29

- **All** (society) - Awareness

Types of Connection
- **Individual** (intimate)
- **Friendship** (relational)   **Symbiotic**
- **Group** (collective)

49

Awareness   30

- Spot the signs
- Spiraling loop

50

                                                 31

Individual Solutions

51

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Individual Change

32

Be kind to yourself

Talk to friends and family and if you cannot, please Google "loneliness helpline" to find a local service

Connect with yourself

Ensure you're comfortable in your seat and either close your eyes or bring your gaze low

Journaling

52

Individual Digital Habits

33

Simple rule

No tech areas/rooms/times

e.g., Meeting Room, Bedroom, Driving, Toilet

< friction in between you and technology

Discourage endless scrolling / binging - app blockers, autoplay off

UnPlug Zone

53

34

Friendship Solutions

54

HS**Talks**

Mr. Chris Flack – Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Self-Worth 35

If you think your friend /colleague is lonely

Don't ask them if they want help

Ask them to help you

55

Volunteering 36

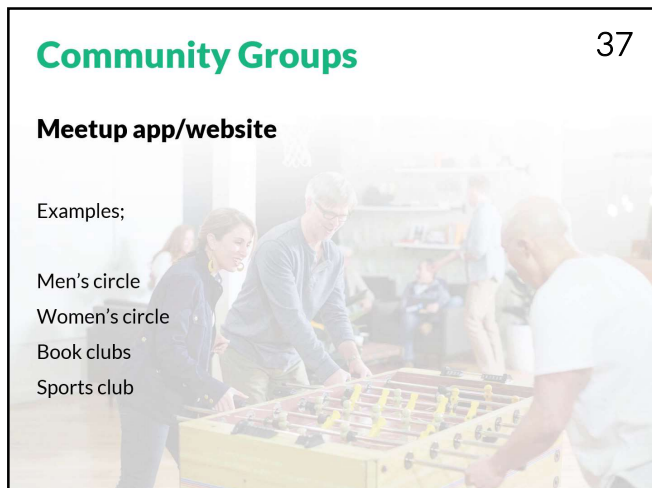Volunteering provides self-worth through a positive purpose and a community

| volunteering near me 🔍

56

Community Groups 37

Meetup app/website

Examples;

Men's circle
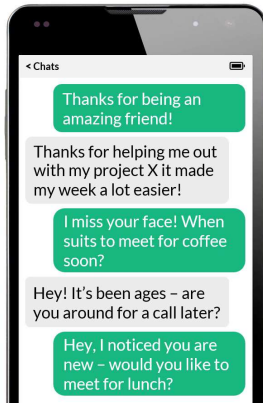Women's circle
Book clubs
Sports club

57

Kindness/Self-Worth

38

Evidence shows that one of the quickest ways for us to feel social connection is through random acts of kindness

58

Kindness/Self-Worth

< Chats

Thanks for being an amazing friend!

Thanks for helping me out with my project X it made my week a lot easier!

I miss your face! When suits to meet for coffee soon?

Hey! It's been ages – are you around for a call later?

Hey, I noticed you are new – would you like to meet for lunch?

59

Social Prescription

39

xxxxx
xxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxx

Plan your week to ensure you have a weekly call/chat with certain connections

Social Prescription

• Send a daily message
• Have a weekly coffee
• Have a monthly meetup

60

Mr. Chris Flack – Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Digital Habits 40

Use social media as a bridge & window*

>friction in between you and humans

*Note accessibility

61

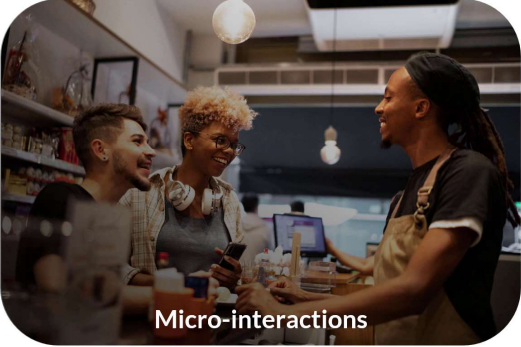**iPhone Effect with Friends** 41

62

42

Group Solutions

(Includes Work)

63

Strength of Weak Ties

43

Micro-interactions

64

Organizational Solutions

44

- It's critical that social wellbeing is integrated to overall wellbeing strategies

Link to DEIB

65

Organisational Framework for Change

45

Highway code of values and norms

Now = importance of "**we are in it together**"

For example;

If you build it, they might come e.g., free food in the canteen

If they build it, they will come e.g., cooking classes for teams each quarter

66

Organisational Framework for Change

Teams that eat together win together

Examples inc. NBA Champions Spurs and Warriors

Studies show similar with firefighters

67

Summary   46

Human Connection over Efficiency

AWARENESS
- What is loneliness
- Understanding the loneliness loop
- Task switching makes it harder for us to connect

SOLUTIONS
- Slow down, be kind to yourself, encourage kindness/self-worth, <friction with tech, >friction with humans
- Organizational guardrails –prioritize social wellbeing, include togetherness in culture

68

Case Study – Global Enterprise Software Company   47

Key challenge was in staff's ability to connect with colleagues post move to hybrid model

Linked to ability to work engagement

As part of DEIB initiative (strategic)

Keynotes to different functions in organisation

Consultancy with leadership on key interventions

69

Mr. Chris Flack – Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Keynotes

48

Keynotes to raise awareness/
normalize the topic

- **Just like hunger**
- **It's a superpower**
- **Spot the signs**
- **Organisational
  solutions presented**

70

Consultancy with Leadership Team on Interventions

49

Interventions
- Volunteering
- Gamify eating together
- Increase friction with tech

Note work design*

*See HS Talks "Digital Wellbeing in an Always-On World"

71

Organisational Framework for Self-Worth - Eating Together

50

Lunch Roulette

Internal collaborative tool randomly
assigns you a buddy and when you are next
in the office you get to do a fun task
together e.g., cocktail making, pizza making

72

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

Organisational Framework for Self-Worth - Volunteering

Volunteering intervention developed

Company have a platform focused on team member donations and tracking volunteer hours that allow team members to convert said hours into donations to the charities of their choosing

51

73

Organizational Framework <Friction with Tech - Zero/One Device Meetings

52

Based on the iPhone Effect study (the "why")

In person meetings = zero devices

Virtual meetings = one device
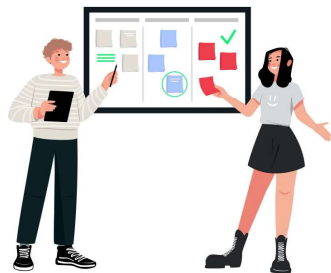
Work design is important here

74

Case Study Results

53

Annual change post-programme delivery;

25% improvement
staff's ability connect with colleagues

12% increase
engagement at work

75

Mr. Chris Flack– Co-founder, UnPlug, Ireland

54

Thank You

Good luck in your social wellbeing project

76

HS**Talks**
By leading world experts

77