

“An exquisite book that reminds us our minds aren’t soloists but symphony players.”

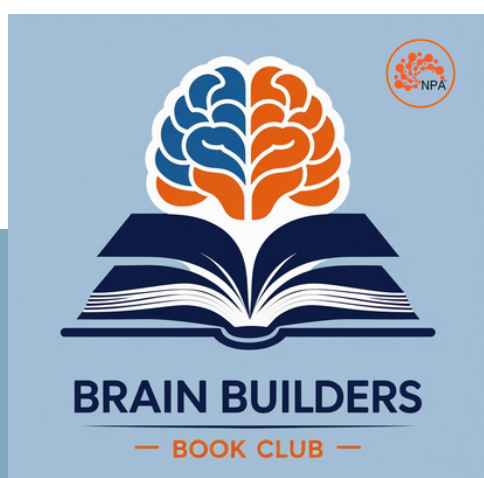
—**DAVID EAGLEMAN, PhD**, author of *Incognito* and *Livewired*

Why Brains Need Friends

The Neuroscience of Social Connection



Ben Rein, PhD



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Discussion Guide

Why Brains Need Friends: The Neuroscience of Social Connection

Author: Ben Rein, Ph.D.

Genre: Health and Science Non-Fiction

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1

Before reading the book, how would you have ranked social connection on a list of things that keep the brain healthy (compared to exercise, sleep, diet, etc.)? Did Rein change your ranking, and if so, why?

2

Rein explains how loneliness physically reshapes brain circuits in ways similar to chronic stress or starvation. Which specific brain changes (e.g., amygdala hyperactivity, reduced prefrontal control, shrinkage in social-cognition areas) surprised or alarmed you the most?

3

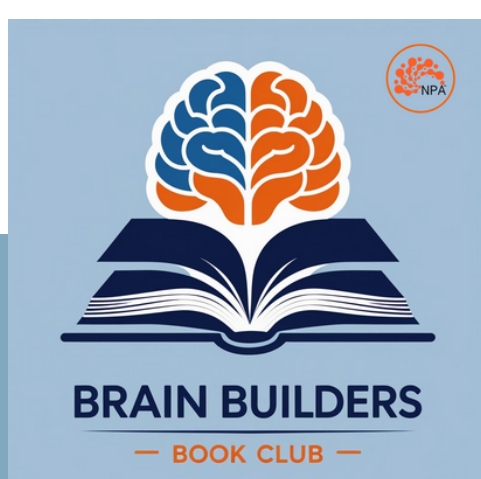
The book contrasts the “social brain hypothesis” (humans evolved large brains mainly to navigate complex relationships) with more traditional views that intelligence evolved for tool-making or problem-solving. Which side do you find more convincing now, and has it shifted how you think about your own friendships?

4

Rein describes experiments showing that a rat will choose social interaction over drugs in certain contexts, and that humans show similar neural reward patterns when helping a friend versus receiving money. Did these findings challenge any assumptions you had about human selfishness or altruism?

5

One of the book’s big ideas is that quality of relationships matters far more than quantity. Can you think of a relationship in your life (past or present) that dramatically affected your mental or even physical health—for better or worse?



6

Rein discusses “social homeostasis”—the brain’s drive to maintain a certain level of connection the way it regulates temperature or blood sugar. Have you ever noticed your own brain pushing you to reach out when you’ve been isolated too long? What did that feel like?

7

The chapter on social media and digital connection presents evidence that online interactions can partially—but not fully—satisfy the brain’s social needs. After reading the research, where do you now draw the line between helpful and harmful online connection in your own life?

8

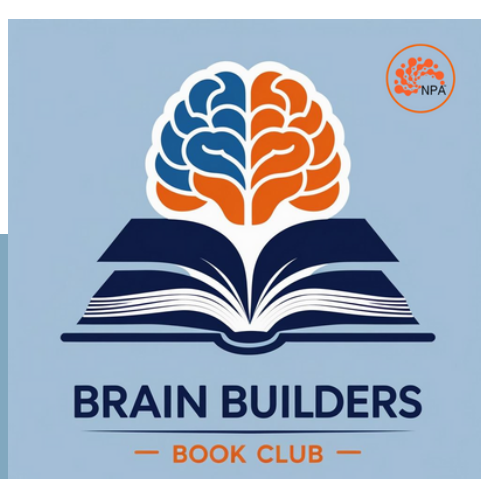
Rein argues that modern society has engineered many loneliness traps (open-plan offices, remote work without structure, dating apps, suburban car culture, etc.). Which of these “traps” do you feel most personally caught in, and what small change could counteract it?

9

Were you convinced by the evidence that deliberate acts of kindness or helping behavior can rewire lonely brains toward resilience? Have you tried (or do you now want to try) any of the practical “social workouts” Rein suggests?

10

At the end of the book, Rein writes that “your brain was never designed to be alone.” If you could give one insight or piece of advice from this book to someone who feels chronically isolated, what would it be—and how has reading it changed your own approach to nurturing friendships going forward?



About the Author

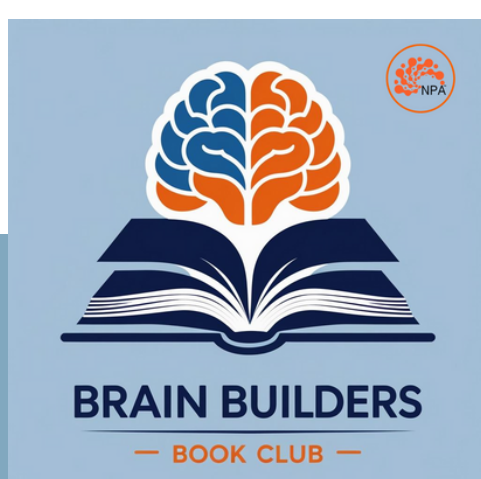


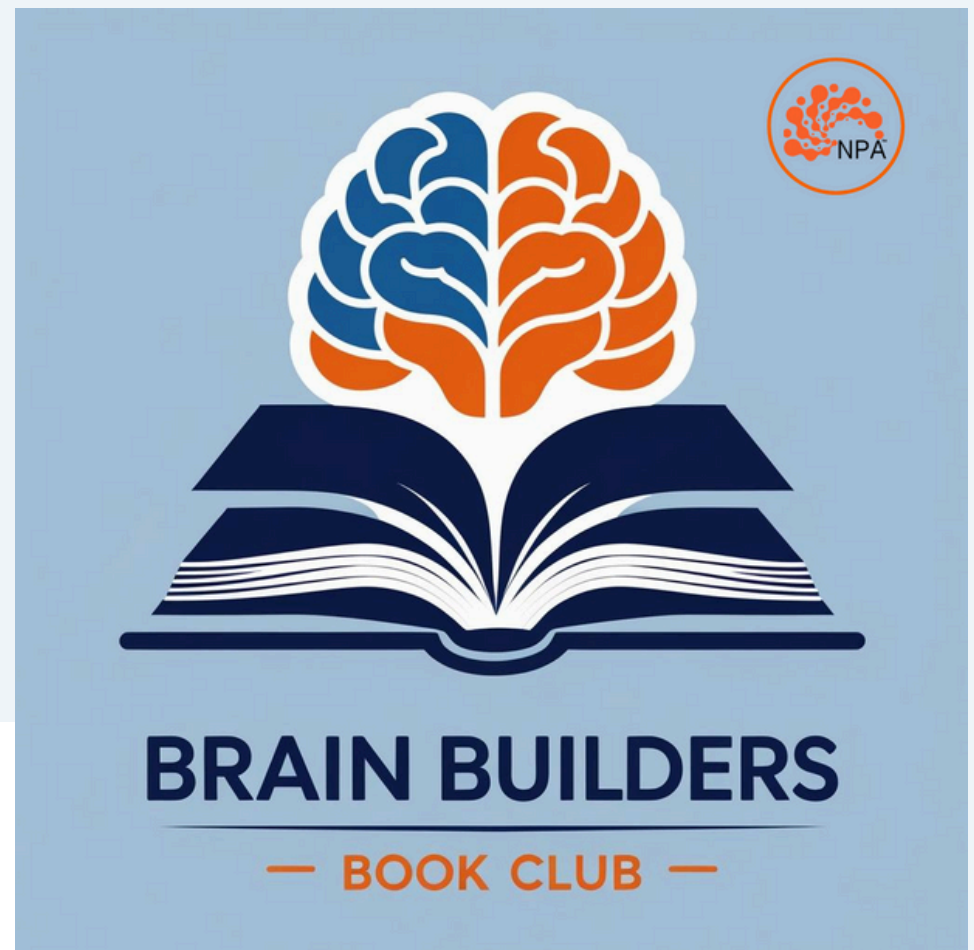
Ben Rein, Ph.D.

Ben Rein, PhD, is a neuroscientist, science communicator, and one of the freshest voices bringing brain research out of the lab and into everyday life. He earned his doctorate at Stanford University School of Medicine, where he studied the neural circuits of social behavior and empathy under the mentorship of Robert Malenka—one of the world’s leading experts on the brain’s reward and connection systems. His groundbreaking research on oxytocin, loneliness, and the effects of MDMA on social bonding has been published in top journals and featured in outlets from The New York Times to NPR.

Beyond the bench, Ben has built a massive online following (over 1 million across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube) by translating complex neuroscience into short, joyful videos that make you go “wait... my brain does WHAT?” With humor, clarity, and zero condescension, he’s the rare scientist who can explain synaptic pruning one minute and why your dog’s stare melts you the next.

Why Brains Need Friends (2025) is his first book—a warm, evidence-packed celebration of human connection as the ultimate brain hack for mental health, creativity, and longevity. Whether he’s breaking down the loneliness epidemic or sharing practical ways to strengthen your “social muscle,” Ben writes (and speaks) like the friend who always knows the coolest new science—and can’t wait to tell you about it over coffee.





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