



Healthy & Resilient You

Understanding Loneliness

Hint: it's not only about being alone.



At the innermost core of all loneliness is a deep and powerful yearning for union with one's lost self.

– **Brendan Behan**

Welcome to the Lonely-Hearts Club

Loneliness has been in the headlines lately, and for good reason. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness a public health crisis. Recent surveys show that it continues to be widespread among U.S. adults.

60% report feeling lonely in the last year

1 in 3 felt lonely at least once a week

30% between ages 18 and 34 felt lonely every day or multiple times a week

Temporary loneliness is a healthy and natural part of the human experience. When the feeling becomes chronic or burdensome, though, it can have serious health consequences.

Complications from chronic loneliness can include a higher risk of heart disease, obesity,

anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, mental impairment, and even premature death.

It's no wonder that one study likened the effects of chronic loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

What Good Is Being Lonely?

Despite those scary statistics, loneliness isn't the enemy. Like other strong or difficult feelings, it serves a purpose.

Bestselling author Gretchen Rubin summed up the function of loneliness this way: "Negative emotions like loneliness, envy, and guilt have an important role to play in a happy life; they're big, flashing signs that something needs to change."

Let's think of loneliness as an essential signal between your body and your brain. One similar to signals like hunger or fatigue. When you're hungry, that's your body telling your brain it's time to eat. When you're sleepy, that's your body saying it's time for nite-nite.

When you're lonely, your body is saying...well... something equally important but a little more complicated.

Only the Lonely...Know If They're Lonely

There's no one-size-fits-all cause (or solution) for loneliness because it's a completely subjective experience—one that's a little different for everyone.

Some people feel lonely when they spend time alone and thrive in a crowd. For others, being in a crowd can paradoxically trigger feelings of isolation and loneliness.

This paradox led social scientists to discover that loneliness isn't necessarily tied to companionship. Rather, it's more about yearning for a *deeper connection*—to others, to yourself, or to a sense of purpose, meaning, or enjoyment.

One Signal, Multiple Causes

Many things can cause you to feel disconnected. Some are clear-cut, such as moving to a new place, starting a new school or job, or losing touch with loved ones—big life changes that take you out of your routines and create physical or emotional distance from your people.

Other causes may be less obvious, like staying embedded in a community you've outgrown, losing enthusiasm for your work or hobbies, having fewer real-world micro-conversations, or moving too much of your social interaction online.

Find Meaning through Connection

Whatever the specific cause, since loneliness signals a sense of disconnection, the solution lies in building and strengthening connections. Consider these tips as starting points.

Be a better friend to yourself – Consciously check in with yourself and pay attention to feelings of loneliness or dissatisfaction. Be intentional in addressing those feelings when they do come up. Set proper [boundaries](#), practice [saying "no"](#)

and use the time and energy you've recovered to regularly enjoy a fulfilling activity or hobby.

Put love out in the world – [Acts of kindness](#) foster connection and belonging, so open doors, smile at everyone liberally, and offer sincere compliments and encouragement as you go along. Learn to build authentic connections with yourself and others with this [Loving Kindness](#) series from eM Life.

Beware empty social media interactions –

By nature, social media places you on the outside looking in, which can cause or worsen feelings of disconnection. Prioritize real people over your phone and look for changes to engage with others online vs. doom scrolling. [Set healthy limits on social media use](#), pay attention to your feelings, and step away if you feel frustrated, agitated, or low.

Embrace micro-conversations – Small talk helps people get to know each other and is the starting point for deeper conversations and connectivity. Make it a point to say "hi" to your neighbors or co-workers and "good morning" to your barista or bus driver every time you see them. Then, when the opportunity arises, you're all more likely to engage in more meaningful conversations and find moments of genuine connection.

Ask for connection when you need it – This could be as small as inviting a friend for coffee or picking up the phone and asking for a few minutes of conversation. [Check out this content](#) for more ways to strengthen and prioritize the important connections in your life.

These strategies and tools can go a long way in helping you foster a deeper sense of connection with yourself, your life, and others. And remember, if you ever feel overwhelmed by loneliness or other hard-to-process feelings, please remember that **Concern is here 24/7** to connect you with experts who can help.

For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Hub by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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