



Presented by BU Happiness College

Loneliness – the Science & How to Address It

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A person is alone when they are by themselves.
A person is lonely when they feel abandoned or
sad due to isolation or lack of connection.



What is loneliness?

In 2021, Australians reported feelings of loneliness increased from 35% to 44%. This means 1 in 4 Australians feel lonely 2 or more times per week.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a feeling that arises when your social needs are unmet by the quantity and quality of our current social relationships. It is a mismatch between the amount of social connection a person wants and the amount they have. Loneliness is an emotional response to perceived isolation.

What are some examples when I have felt lonely?

Where in my body do I experience loneliness? What do my thoughts look like?



What is being alone?

Alone & Solitude

Being “alone” is a physical state where you are physically by yourself.

You can be alone, or by yourself in many day to day activities such as: showering, moments at work, going for a walk, taking a lunch break, cooking dinner etc.

Also - Solitude: on the other hand, is voluntary. People who enjoy spending time by themselves continue to maintain positive social relationships that they can return to when they crave connection. They still spend time with others, but these interactions are balanced with periods of time alone.

The difference: Being lonely is a psychological state characterised occurring when one's social relationships are (self-)perceived to be less in quantity and quality than desired.

What are some benefits of being alone or having time for me?



Some statistics

Social Neuroscientist John T. Cacioppo is a pioneer in studying and researching loneliness as well as its effects and causes. For 27 years. These are some of his findings:

- Chronic loneliness increases the odds of an early death by 20%. Which is about the same effect as obesity
- For people that are prone to feeling lonely, the brain switches easily into self-preservation mode when feeling loneliest - quick to see social danger even when it isn't there.
- In another study, Cacioppo brought lonely and non-lonely young adults into a sleep lab. The lonely subjects, he found, had more disordered, less restorative sleeping, with more micro-awakenings during the night.
- A few years ago, Cacioppo and his colleague, Louise Hawkley, summarized a collection of psychological studies linking loneliness to a variety of mental health problems: increased negativity, depressive thinking, heightened sensitivity to social threats, and trouble with impulse control.
- Lonely people tended to feel put upon and misunderstood. They were, the researchers wrote, "more likely to attribute problems in social relationships to others," and to see themselves "as victims who are already giving as much as they can to their relationships."
- How to begin to change these cognitive distortions? "The simple realization that we are not passive victims, that we do have some control, and that we can change our situation by changing our thoughts, expectations, and behaviors toward others can have a surprisingly empowering effect."
- Chronic loneliness is harmful; but short-term loneliness can be positive and necessary because it highlights the need for social connections.

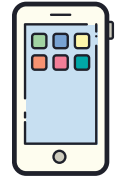
Your tools



Get clear on what connection looks like



Identity



Recognise distraction techniques



Create healthy habits & routines



Embrace alone time

Which of these resonate with me?

A large, empty, light gray rounded rectangular box intended for the user to write their responses to the question above.



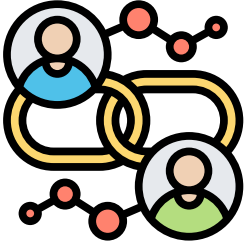
Starting to create your identity

Examples to add here: My name, I am ... , I like ... , I enjoy ... , significant people in my life, my habits & routines are ... , I feel good when ...



Me!

Getting clear on connection



What does connection look like to me currently?



Where in my body do I notice I feel connection to others?



When do I feel most connected - both to myself and / or others

A photograph of a person's hands holding a pen and writing in a notebook. The person is wearing a dark shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with light-colored curtains.

Key Takeaways

Takeaway 1...

Takeaway 2...

Takeaway 3...



Citations & referencing

References

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