

Mental Health Awareness Month | *Article*

Kick That Lonely Feeling

Loneliness is a tricky emotion to understand. Maybe you feel like you're lacking attachments you once had, or you're facing something new like an unfamiliar school, town, job or other life change. Perhaps you feel like you don't have anyone to share in your feelings, or feel unlovable — even if others don't think so — and aren't sure why. However it presents itself, loneliness creates powerful feelings of emptiness and isolation, but it's more common than you think.

Nearly half of Americans often feel alone or left out. Loneliness is not necessarily the same as being alone, though. We may be alone for long periods without feeling lonely at all. On the other hand, we may feel lonely in a familiar setting without really understanding why.

Loneliness can be made more intense by what you tell yourself it means. Research suggests that people who think of loneliness as a defect tend to have difficulties taking social risks or initiating social contact, and are likely to approach social encounters with cynicism and mistrust. It doesn't take much to combat feelings of loneliness—studies suggest that just one conversation with someone close to you per day can have a significant impact on health and well-being.

However, loneliness is neither a permanent state nor “bad” in itself. Instead, look at it as a signal that some important needs are going unmet.

This could be a variety of things, but there are some ways you can try to kick that feeling.

Get involved with a club, church, a part-time job or volunteer work that you're genuinely interested in, so you're more likely to meet people with common interests.

Don't judge new people based on your past relationships. Instead, be open to seeing new people from a fresh perspective.

Value all of your friendships and their unique characteristics rather than believing that only a romantic relationship can relieve your loneliness.



61%

of American adults feel as though they lack companionship.



Use your alone time to get to know yourself. Think of it as an opportunity to develop independence and to learn to take care of your own emotional needs. You can grow in important ways during time alone.

Explore the possibility of doing things alone that you usually do with other people (like going to the movies or taking a vacation somewhere new).

Don't decide ahead of time how you're going to feel about an activity. Keep an open mind.

No matter how bad you feel, loneliness will diminish or even disappear when you focus attention and energy on your needs and learning new ways to meet them. Don't wait for your feelings to get you going — get going and the good feelings will follow.

How to get help

If you think feelings of loneliness are negatively impacting your quality of life, reach out for help:

1. Call the number on your insurance card for a referral to a trained mental health professional.
2. Talk to your primary care doctor about your concerns.
3. Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2020 CIGNA U.S. Loneliness Index; Sage Journals, Communication Research, 0(0).