

Feeling Connected to Others

We are social creatures by nature; this means we need to be around others to feel safe. When you add an uncertain economy, social unrest, and a lack of support, it is understandable that people are overwhelmed - and perhaps agitated without knowing why. Similar to being burned out, people may not even recognize the signs of being isolated (low energy, insomnia, sadness) or realize they are lonely. People tend to withdraw from others when stressed, which unfortunately leads to more stress. Interacting with others helps our mental wellbeing and physical health. We need to physically distance, but we can certainly still be social. It will look different, but the benefits are similar. How to be less isolated:



Accept it might be awkward

Communication is a skill. People can be self-conscious about their rusty communication skills. After months of socially distancing, connecting with others is going to take effort. Some people have only been talking to their pets. Conversely, others have spent so much time with their family that someone new to talk with is like winning the lottery. Furthermore, many are emotionally exhausted, and it is easier to self-isolate. Fear and suspicion of those outside one's bubble can happen. Be patient, kind, and forgiving.

Explain what you are doing

Let them know that many people are feeling overwhelmed and lonely. They will likely agree and be less defensive. Ask them for their help with feeling connected to others. Many people welcome the opportunity to help others, and it makes them feel better when they do. It is a prosocial behavior that is part of our DNA. you are idle that your mind will have to search

Demonstrate good manners

Conversations should not be competitions. Two-way communication is where both people are engaged in the experience through listening and speaking. It is about a win-win mindset. Lead with curiosity and respect for fresh perspectives.

What are the effects of loneliness?

Loneliness, living alone, and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease, and depression.

But, these do not have to be the case!
You can build connection by taking small steps and improving your relationships!

Recognize people are grieving

Being positive is essential; however, it is also vital to give people time to process feelings of loss. The realization that Life is going to be different is settling in for people. The loss of what Life was like can be hard to accept. In time, people will move through the grief stages at their own pace. And, so will you with support, empathy, and time.



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Start Small

This is not the time to ask about family secrets. It is time to learn a few safe tidbits about someone else. Focusing on similarities brings us closer together, while differences push us apart. Think about this when you ask questions. Ask someone to share something for which they are thankful? Explain that when we express gratitude, we get a little boost of mental energy. Dig into their answer to get into the *why* with additional questions. You might not understand their perspective, but have some fun with it. Be playful. If they have had successes, congratulate them! Researchers find that how we respond to someone's good news is more important than the bad news.

Build on it

Small talk is good, but people tire of it quickly. It can feel comfortable but leave you empty. Ask for advice on a project or find something simple you can work on together. Collaboration brings people together, even when apart. Shared purpose unites. Pick small things that you can accomplish and then celebrate for a quick pick-me-up. A sense of accomplishment feels good and offsets the isolation.

Establish, honor, and push boundaries

Feeling safe helps our critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We establish boundaries to provide psychological safety. Trust is built when we honor boundaries. Yet, we grow when we explore beyond our comfort zone and requires us to reach out to others. The result? We don't feel as alone.

Many of us feel cheated in 2020. The reality is that we make plans, and Life laughs. The rules have changed, but that is okay. You can too.

Source: Loneliness. 2020. eBook, WELCOA

Someone has to go first

If you wait for someone else to make an effort to connected, you might be waiting a long time. To get the ball rolling, try these helpful tips:

Smile:

It is signal that you are friendly. With that said, it has to be natural. Practice by thinking of people you care about or a funny story. This signals your brain to smile authentically.

Open your posture:

If your arms are crossed, your body language is telling people to not approach you. People will not make an attempt. Keep your head up, shoulders relaxed, and arms open.

Use names:

People like to hear their name. And, they might forget yours. Mix in their name as you ask questions; include your name when you share information about yourself. Hearing your name again gives people a chance to remember you and something interesting you shared.



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