

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Dealing with Loneliness

It can come as a sense of emptiness: of feeling disconnected, alone even in a crowd. Often, it's accompanied by sadness, resentment or anxiety. New situations can trigger loneliness: the loss of a partner, a move to a new community, a job promotion or transfer. On the other hand, loneliness can creep in when relationships and situations become repetitive or routine. Boredom and loneliness frequently go hand in hand.

Given the importance that some people attach to being popular or successful, it's not surprising that many find it hard to admit they're lonely, even to themselves. However, loneliness is a part of being human; no one is immune. In many ways, loneliness is a healthy signal. It can stir us to make changes; to begin a process that may increase social contacts; improve relationships and explore activities that offer learning and growth. These activities don’t always need to involve others. We can feel content or connected even when we are alone.

Here are some constructive ways to begin dealing with loneliness:

Slow down and be more attentive to your surroundings. You can begin by making healthier choices and taking time to enjoy your food. It might also mean scheduling regular walks or bike rides and stopping to notice some interesting shop or garden along the way. Ask yourself: "Am I falling into the trap of all work and no play?" If so, you may want to start setting goals in the following areas:

- Personal well-being (physical/intellectual/spiritual)
- Relationships (enhancing existing ones/forming new ones)
- Community activities

Stimulate your sense of curiosity. Pick up a newspaper and look for an interesting event or function. Rekindle an old hobby by exploring what the new developments are. Curiosity engages the mind. It encourages us to make connections, and seek answers.

Send the right signals to people. Too often, we send people mixed social messages. We make dates, then cancel or leave no message at all, waiting for others to call and when they don't, writing them off. If you want to spend time with people, schedule a time and stick to it.

Hone your social skills. For some people, loneliness stems from not knowing the "appropriate" things to do or say socially. If you are concerned about this, check out the local bookstore or library for guides on etiquette, interpersonal relationships, and communicating. Or check out an organization in your area to hone your speaking skills.

Follow your interests. Enroll in an adult education course, attend antique shows or science fairs or organize an after-work event among your co-workers. Friendships are often established through people that share a common interest.

Reach out as a volunteer. Few activities bring such a sense of personal satisfaction as providing a useful service for those in need. There are many possibilities—hospitals, animal shelters, recreation centres or a senior's facility, to name just a few.

Try "reconnecting" with people. Track down old friends, former colleagues, and others you have lost touch with. An old relationship might flourish anew.

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Maintain connections when you travel. If frequent travel is a source of your loneliness, take a couple of photographs or comforting mementos with you or call someone from your hotel at an agreed-upon time.

How to Feel Connected When You're Alone

- Listen to music or read an uplifting book
- Take a walk in a park, field or forest
- Attend a country fair or community event
- Play with a pet
- Give your plants some tender loving care
- Visit a place of worship
- Browse through a museum, zoo or art gallery
- Study the night sky or visit a planetarium
- Trace your family tree
- Chart your horoscope
- Call a phone-in radio show or tap into a computer chat line
- Write a letter to the editor
- Take a bubble bath
- Cook your favorite meal

When it comes to dealing with loneliness, doing things that get you to feel more connected can make all the difference in the world.

Sometimes, no matter how much a person tries to cope, there is the need to speak with a professional to manage and overcome negative emotions that seem to be a part and parcel of loneliness.