

# Coping with Loneliness

## Objective

To identify ways to decrease your feelings of loneliness.

## You Should Know

Everyone feels lonely from time to time. But loneliness can become a problem when your need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. Loneliness is not always the same as being alone, because you might choose to be alone and feel content without much contact with others. One the other hand, you might have lots of social contact, or be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely – especially if you feel misunderstood by or disconnected from the people around you.

Loneliness can have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if you have felt lonely for a long time. Research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk for certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems, and increased stress levels.

This worksheet will help you identify if your loneliness is something that is affecting your mental health, and show you ways to cope with it.

## What to Do

Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- I often feel lonely.
- I feel drained of energy and unmotivated to socialize.
- My aloneness means no one wants to spend time with me.
- I lack daily companionship and this is upsetting to me.
- I am not successful at maintaining relationships (friendships, family connections, or romantic partnerships).
- I dread vacations or time off work because I am always alone.
- I have an empty void to fill on weekends or when I am not at work or school.
- I feel isolated and blue on holidays.
- I feel awkward at social events because I am single in a “couple’s world.”
- Even when I am in a group of people I feel alone.
- I need people more than they need me.

\_\_\_\_ I feel rejected.

Now, review the list and write down the top two statements that are most distressing to you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Here are some suggestions to coping with your loneliness.

1. **Take it slow.** If you have felt lonely for a long time, it can be scary to think about meeting and connecting with new people. You do not have to rush into socializing! Start off by going to a park or outdoor café – somewhere you can be around people, but you do not have to talk to them. You might discover simply being around other people is enough.

2. **Make new connections.** If you feel lonely because you lack satisfying social contact, you can meet people by joining a class or group based on your hobbies or interests. Volunteering is also a great way to meet people. Helping others can also help improve your well-being. For example, if you find holidays unbearably lonely, you might volunteer at a soup kitchen.

3. **Try peer support.** There are many types of peer support services, providing you with a space to use your experiences to help and support others. You might look into online or virtual communities, like Peer Support Solutions, Support Groups Central, or Beyond My Battle (which is a pandemic-specific social distance support group). These communities provide a place to listen and share with others who have similar experiences. Many online groups are available 24/7, most are free, and you can access them wherever you are.

4. **Open up to others.** You might know plenty of people, but you do not feel close to them, or they do not offer the care and attention you need. It might help to open up about how you feel to friends and family. If you do not feel comfortable opening up, try speaking with a therapist or a using a peer support service.

5. **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** It might be hard to stop comparing yourself to others, but remember things are not always what they seem from the outside. For example, on social media, you only see what others want to share about their lives, and this can make you believe you are the only lonely person! You do not know how others feel when they are alone, or when they are not posting on social media. If you are concerned that social media is affecting your mental health, take a break.

6. **Care for yourself.** Feeling lonely can be stressful and impact your general well-being, which might make it harder to take steps to feel better. Think about how the following areas are affecting how you feel; consider if you can make changes.

- Sleep. Getting too little or too much sleep can impact how you feel.
- Diet. Eating a nutritious diet on a regular schedule makes a difference to your mood and energy levels.



## Reflections on This Exercise

Did practicing any of the activities decrease your feelings of loneliness? Explain.

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What was your favorite activity? Will you continue this activity? Why or why not?

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Did you meet new people and create new connections with others? Describe your experiences.

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After completing this exercise, did you find your feelings of loneliness were reduced? Why or why not?

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What else can you do to decrease your feelings of loneliness?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

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