


YOU'RE NOT ALONE:
STRATEGIES TO
OVERCOME LONELINESS

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The background features a large, abstract geometric design. It consists of several overlapping triangular shapes. A large, light blue triangle occupies the upper left and center. A darker blue triangle is positioned below it on the left side. A red triangle is located at the bottom left corner. The right side of the image is a plain white background.

*I am too alone in the
world and not alone
enough to make every
moment holy.*

-Rainer Maria Rilke

A definition of loneliness

Loneliness is when a person is experiencing a discrepancy between the actual and desired level of social connections in their life.

WHAT DOES LONELINESS LOOK LIKE?

Loneliness is not just the stereotypical image.

“I feel like if I disappeared tomorrow, no one would even notice.”

“I feel like I am doing all of this on my own and it is such a heavy load. I don't have time for any fun anymore.”

“I have a great spouse and family. I don't understand why I feel such a void in my life.”



3 DIMENSIONS OF LONELINESS

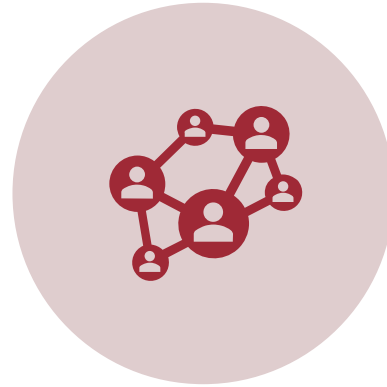
Lack in any of these dimensions or types of relationships can make us feel lonely.

1. **Intimate Relationship Loneliness:** This is closeness with a confidant or intimate partner– one with whom you share deep trust and vulnerability.
2. **Relational (or Social Relationship) Loneliness:** This is friendship based on social connection.
3. **Collective Relationship Loneliness:** This is with a community or network.

PRE-PANDEMIC CHANGES WERE SLOWLY INCREASING LONELINESS



Texting as our #1 form of communication!



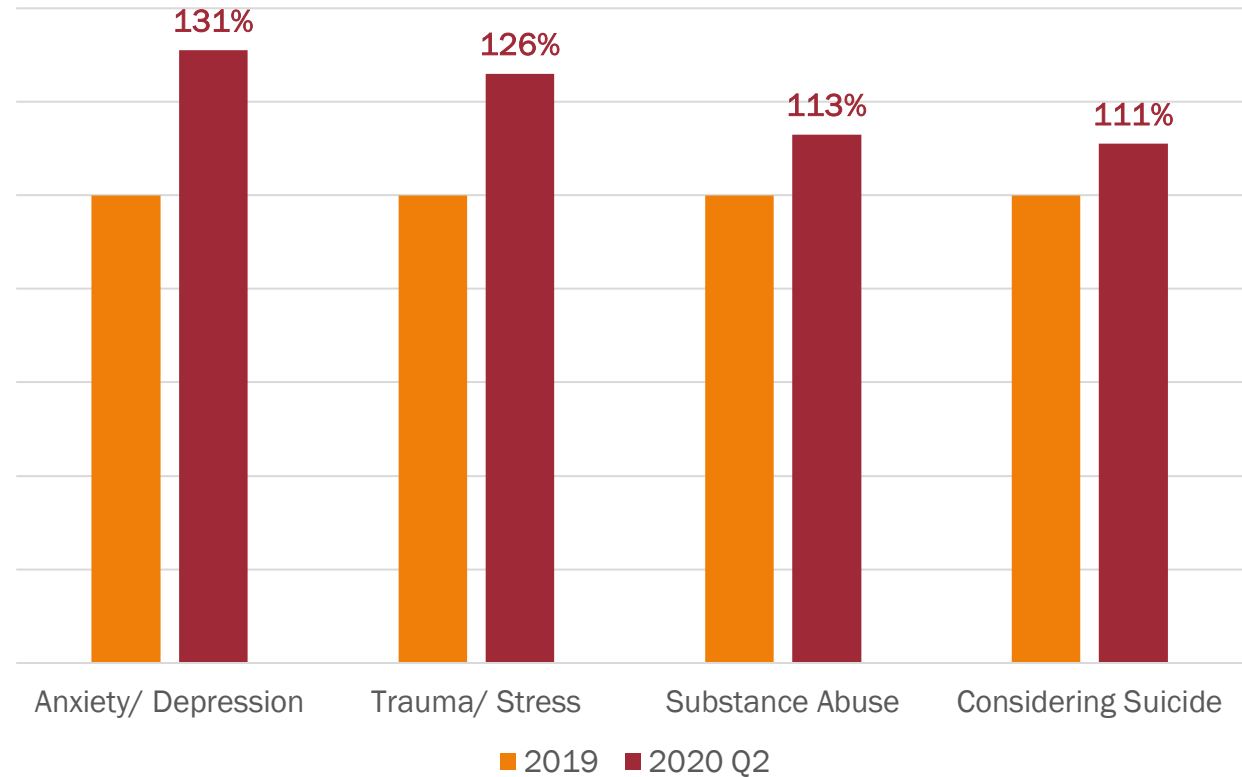
New social norms have a huge increase in activating a sense of loneliness/rejection.



Social media impact

GENERAL PUBLIC RISE IN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Significant increases in prevalence of mental health issues from 2019 to April-June of 2020.



SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS

LONELINESS IS ON THE RISE

Two specific populations are reporting an increase in loneliness at a rate of over 50%.

1. Adolescents and Young Adults

In a survey of 1,008 people aged 18–35, **65%** reported increased feelings of loneliness since the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic.

SOURCE: VIVIANA HORIGIAN, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

2. The Elderly

- In June 2020, **56%** of people over 50 said they sometimes or often felt isolated, compared to **27%** in 2018
- Nationally representative sample of 2,074 adults aged 50 to 80

SOURCE: [NATIONAL POLL ON HEALTHY AGING](#)

OUR LONELY BRAIN



- When feeling lonely or rejected, the area in the brain that lights up is the pain center.
- Evolutionary factor: we are more likely to survive with a tribe than alone
- Loneliness can increase a person's risk of early death as much as obesity or smoking
- Neuroscience shows social isolation can change and even shrink our brain (Antarctic research, 14-month MRIs)

PHYSIOLOGIC EFFECTS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION


Social isolation and loneliness lead to an **increase** in:

- Blood pressure
- Circulating stress hormones
- Inflammation

On a chronic basis, these can

- Produce long term health problems, or
- Exacerbate existing health problems.

HOW TO OVERCOME AND REDIRECT LONELINESS

1. What you can do by yourself.
 2. What you can do with others.
 3. Overall Life Skills Expansion: the Healing Wheel
- 

ESTABLISH A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH ALONE

- Find enjoyment in time alone.
- Find appreciation in time with others.
- The key is gratitude.
- How we define things is how we experience them.

Every particle of creation sings its own song of what is and what is not. Hearing what is can make you wise; hearing what is not can drive you mad.

–Ghalib

PROVEN RESILIENCY STRATEGIES FOR LONELINESS

- Practice gratitude –
over 11,000 pieces
of research
- Give to others
- Practice mindfulness



THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM

The perception of a good support system reduces one's reactions to stress-inducing tasks, in comparison to those who do not identify as having a good support system.

- Research by Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Ph.D.



INVEST IN YOUR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

New ways of connecting are vital:

- Establish new greetings- *“I see you!” “I am here!”*
- Find new ways to connect with existing loved ones
- Reach out to new forms of creating and meeting

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT LONELINESS

1. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Exercise helps build positive emotions and manage stress.
- Try a free online class.
- Use the Virgin Pulse portal and earn rewards (UVA & UPG).
- Share a goal with a buddy to support each other while combatting the effects of loneliness on one's health.

2. FIGHT MONOTONY

- Our brain needs novelty.
- Learn a new hobby.
- If working from home, move to a different part of your house, go outside for a walk, call a friend from work or set up a coffee break.
- At work, take a break, go outside.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT LONELINESS (CONT'D)

3. MAINTAIN ACTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- Set up a weekly gathering to reduce planning.
- Play a game together online like trivia.
- Reach out to people that you think may be feeling isolated.
- Start a virtual book club with friends/family.

4. LEVERAGE ESTABLISHED WORK GROUPS OR CLUBS

- If you are part of a group that has not been meeting, encourage leaders to identify 1-2 ways to try to engage members.



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- Connect with nature
- Connect with our pets or adopt
- Connect with spirituality – whatever that looks like for you



Spiritual



Yoga



Meditation



Community



Dance /
Rhythm



Equine Therapy



Journaling



Physical



Self Defense



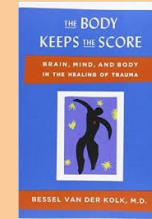
Exercise



Acupuncture



Therapy



TBKTS



EMDR



Friendships

Mental



Emotional

REACH OUT TO NEW RESOURCES OR RELATIONSHIP CONNECTIONS



- Start a new skill or interest, such as a musical instrument or form of art and seek an instructor or class for such.
- Join an on-line Book Club or Class of interest.
- Seek local involvement

REFLECTION

We do not learn from
experience... we learn
from reflecting on
experience.

- John Dewey

QUESTIONS?

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Thank you for participating!

- You'll receive a follow-up email tomorrow, with the slides and links to the meeting recording and an **evaluation survey**. Your anonymous feedback helps us improve!
- March emotional well-being seminar: “**Nourishing Restorative Sleep**” with Anna DeLong, LCSW
 - Learn how consistently healthy sleep is linked to many well-being markers, from willpower and emotional regulation to overall physical health. This seminar will include a guided exercise designed to promote deep relaxation-- systematically and organically-- and ultimately healthy sleep.
 - Tues. March 9, 12-1pm (Virtual Seminar/ Zoom meeting) or Weds. March 24, 3:30–4:30pm (Webinar)
 - Learn more and register at <https://uvafeap.com/events> or through the events calendar in the portal
- Hoos Well reward
 - UVA and UPG Health Plan participants can earn \$25 in rewards for participating in 1 seminar per quarter
 - The ability to [claim your reward](#) in the [new Hoos Well portal](#) will be **available again in March**
- Questions? Email us anytime at EmotionalWellbeing@virginia.edu



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