



Physically Distanced, Socially connected

HUMAN BEINGS ARE SOCIAL CREATURES

We need to interact with others and build relationships. When our need for social connection is not met, it takes a toll on us mentally and physically. Lately a lot of people have been feeling isolated and disconnected. For children, playing with friends isn't just about having fun. It is also a way to learn social skills, to cultivate a sense of morality and to develop a sense of who you are as an individual. For adolescents, spending time with friends and feeling supported by friends are some of the strongest protective factors against anxiety and depression. Now we have to find new ways to connect so that we can maintain relationships, bounce ideas off each other, and gain exposure to different perspectives.

EFFECTS OF LONELINESS:



Mental

- Higher levels of perceived stress in comparison to non-lonely people exposed to the same stressors.
- Difficulty regulating emotions, which can lead to depression and/or anxiety.
- Diminished concentration and difficulty processing information, which can lead to struggles with decision making and impaired memory.



Physical

- Increased levels of stress hormones which lead to increased heart and blood pressure (which in turn can lead to increased risk of heart disease, vascular problems and inflammation), digestive problems (including heartburn and gastric reflux), weight gain, and headaches
- Diminished quality and efficiency of sleep so that you may be spending more time in bed but feeling less rested and restored.
- Compromised immune functioning, making it more likely that you'll get sick and making it harder for your body to recover from illness and injury.

LONELINESS IS felt when the social relationships you have don't measure up to what you want.

LONELINESS IS NOT about being alone. You can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely.

It's not the number but the QUALITY of social connections you have that matters.



WHAT LONELINESS LOOKS LIKE:

- Sadness
- Unsure of self
- Excessive talking
- Seeking attention through misbehavior, silliness, interrupting or constantly needing validation
- Restlessness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Clinginess
- Low self-esteem (e.g. assuming no one wants to interact with you)
- Overly emotional
- Reclusiveness
- Saying things like "I'm lonely," "I don't have any friends" or "Nobody likes me."

STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING SATISFYING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FROM A SAFE PHYSICAL DISTANCE:



Watch a movie or TV show together and discuss.



Start a virtual book club. Choose a book to read and discuss together as a group.



Learn something new together. Watch an instructional video, then set up video chats to discuss planning, progress, struggles and outcomes.



Build teamwork skills by working with a partner or group to do a project. Use a cloud-based platform to share documents or slides.



Make a craft, draw a picture, or write a letter and drop it off in a friend's mailbox.



Create a scavenger hunt. Make a list of items to be found. Challenge friends to take pictures of themselves with the items as they find them and send the pictures back to you.



Create a challenge. Challenge your friends to do something like creating a dance to a specific song or writing a song or poem about a topic. Share the results.



Do something kind. Acts of kindness boost levels of oxytocin and dopamine in the body, which are associated with increasing positive feelings.



Increase comfort with being alone. You are your own constant companion. It isn't always necessary to have someone else with you to have fun.



Change unhelpful thoughts. Watch out for these thought ruts: should (e.g. "I should be out playing with friends"), personalization (e.g. "No one wants to talk to me"), or self-defeating (e.g. "I'm not very interesting").

CO-REGULATION

Co-regulation refers to warm, and responsive interactions between adults and young people that provide the young people with the support, coaching and modeling that they need to be able to learn how to understand and appropriately express their thoughts, feelings and behaviors.* Children are very observant. They notice and imitate what they see adults around them doing. They also pick up on more subtle indicators of the adults' stress levels and emotional states. One of the best things parents can do for their children is to take good care of themselves.



EVERYONE FEELS LONELY AT TIMES

Loneliness is a normal feeling that almost everyone will experience at some point in their life. It is the natural response to many situations. People have a basic need to feel connected to and understood by others. They need someone with whom they can share things and interests. Everyone needs someone whose attention matters to them, someone who would notice if they weren't around and would miss them.

*Murray, D. W., Rosanbalm, K., Christopoulos, C., & Hamoudi, A. (2015). Self-regulation and toxic stress: Foundations for understanding self-regulation from an applied developmental perspective (OPRE Report 2015-21). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

