Loneliness and Social Isolation

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Think, pair, share……

Why do you think loneliness is on the rise?

Why do you think generation Z (born mid-1990s to early-2000s) is the loneliest generation?
Loneliness - the discrepancy between a person’s social relationships and what they desire and need as far as social relationships.

Contributors:
- Stigma
- Social Isolation
- Built Environment
- Technology
- Changes in work culture
- Disconnection from faith community
2018 Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index

Survey of 20,000 Americans report that they “always” or “sometimes”

- feel like no one knows them well – 54%
- feel alone – 46%
- feel left out – 47%
- feel a lack of companionship – 43%
- feel like relationships are not meaningful – 43%
- feel isolated from others – 43%
- feel like they are no longer close to anyone – 39%

Only 53% report meaningful in-person social interactions on a daily basis.
A growing body of evidence suggests that there is an epidemic of loneliness and social isolation in the United States with significant negative physical and mental health effects:

Loneliness affects more than one-third of American adults, with particular likelihood among individuals facing challenging life circumstances like loss of a loved one, and chronic or catastrophic illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, mental illness or cancer.

Loneliness has negative effects on mental health, worsening depression, anxiety, mood disorders and cognitive decline, and on physical health, leading to higher rates cardiovascular impairment, chronic pain, and fatigue.
External factors may be accelerating the crisis; research indicates, for instance, Internet and social media engagement exacerbate feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

Of particular note, health risks associated with loneliness and social isolation are comparable to the dangers of smoking and obesity, increasing mortality risk by up to 30%.

Certain age groups, notably adolescents, young adults and older adults seem to be particularly at risk as marked by growing incidence of depression, substance abuse, and suicide.
Social isolation impact on teens:

Beyond Differences  www.beyonddifferences.org/social-isolation/
Former Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy on “CBS This Morning”
Among individuals with severe mental illness, the prevalence of loneliness is approximately twice that of the general population. Increasing feelings of loneliness also increase feelings of shyness, anxiety, anger and decreased feelings of social skills, optimism, self-esteem and social support.

The number of friends or social interactions is not as predictive of loneliness as the quality of relationships. Difficulty forming meaningful social connections vs loss of meaningful social connections.
Types of loneliness

- Emotional – lack of intimate relationships
- Social – lack of satisfying contact with others
- Collective – feeling of not being valued by the broader community
- Existential – sense that life lacks meaning or purpose

Questioning “cover terms” and active listening can help you understand more about the nature of the loneliness that a person is experiencing.
Research comparing lonely and non-lonely:

Compared to the non-lonely, **lonely individuals**: 
- Approach social encounters with greater cynicism and interpersonal mistrust 
- Rate themselves and others more negatively 
- Are more likely to expect others to reject them 
- Have lower feelings of self-worth 
- Tend to blame themselves for social failures 
- Are more self-conscious in social situations 
- Adopt behaviors that increase likelihood of rejection
Common cause of persistent loneliness

**Maladaptive Social Cognition** – distrust, negativity and the expectation of rejection

Researchers from the University of Chicago found that interventions that address maladaptive social cognition (e.g. CBT - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) are generally more effective than those that teach social skills or promote social interactions.
Technology and social media

YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms among teens. Fully 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online 'almost constantly'.

Studies of the impact of technology and social media have varied results. There is a need for more targeted and longitudinal research to reach definitive conclusions.
Dangers of social media

- **Focusing on likes**: The need to gain “likes” on social media can cause teens to make choices they would otherwise not make, including altering their appearance, engaging in negative behaviors, and accepting risky social media challenges.

- **Cyberbullying**: Cyberbullying is associated with depression, anxiety, and an elevated risk of suicidal thoughts.

- **Making comparisons**: Everything from physical appearance to life circumstances to perceived successes and failures are under a microscope on social media elevating comparisons.

- **Having too many fake friends**: Even with privacy settings in place, teens can collect thousands of friends through friends of friends on social media. The more people on the friend list, the more people have access to screenshot photos, Snaps, and updates and use them for other purposes. There is no privacy on social media and teens can easily lose control of personal information.

- **Less face time**: Social interaction skills require daily practice, even for teens. It’s difficult to build empathy and compassion when teens spend more time “engaging” online than they do in person. Human connection is a powerful tool and builds skills that last a lifetime.

“Social Media and Teens: How Does Social Media Affect Teenagers’ Mental Health” by Katie Hurly
Data specific to the link of technology and social media to suicide is, at best, unclear.
Impact on teens:

The Maryland 2016 Youth Risk and Behavior Survey reveals:

- Students who felt sad or hopeless (almost every day for >=2 weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities) increased from 26.8% in 2014 to 29.9% in 2016
- Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide increased from 15.9% in 2014 to 17.3% in 2016

Nationally:

- Suicide rates for those ages 15-24 increased from 10.1% in 2000 to 14.6% in 2017

https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/
Suicide Rates In America

People 85 years and older face one of the highest suicide rates of any age group.

Source: Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, 2017 data
Credit: Nick Underwood/NPR
Maryland Suicides 2010-2014
Suicide attempt to death ratio
(American Association of Suicidology, 2015a)

Adolescents
100:1
Suicide Attempts

Suicide attempt to death ratio
(American Association of Suicidology, 2015a)

Average of all Ages
25:1
Suicide Attempts

- Suicide attempt to death ratio (Suicidology, 2015a)

**Older Adults**

4:1
Older adult concerns

- Plan is more likely to be thought out vs. impulsive
- Plans are less likely to be revealed / discovered
- Less likelihood of discovery / rescue after the fatal incident
- Less likely to recover from attempt
- More lethal means
- “Passive” methods can be difficult to detect
“Growing older in America can be very hard. People don't talk to you.”
People with low levels of loneliness report:

- Daily “meaningful” interaction with people
- Contentedness with relationships
- Good physical and mental health
- Being well-rested
- Being employed (or retired) and not feeling overworked
- Being physically active
- Spending “just the right amount of time” with loved ones
People with low levels of loneliness report:

- Having lower levels of anxiety and depression
- Having higher self-esteem
- Feeling greater empathy for others
- Better self-regulation skills
- Stronger immune systems
- Being more trusting and cooperative
Approaches to loneliness

What are some ways you can help to combat isolation among people you know? People can be family members, friends, colleagues, clients.... Anyone.
Early intervention & prevention

- Talk about loneliness
  - Active listening
- Explore root causes and options for meaningful social engagement
- Notice “red flags” of suicidal ideation
- Ask the individual about:
  - Support systems
  - Sources of meaning
  - Sources of motivation
  - Feelings, desires and needs
- Offer reassurance, information and resources (warm hand off)
OLD COOTS GIVING ADVICE
It's probably bad advice, but it's free.
The UnLonely Project [https://artandhealing.org/ #](https://artandhealing.org/#) seeks to:

- Raise awareness about loneliness as a pressing health problem and promote creative expression as an innovative approach to alleviate it.

- Offer tools, resources, and programs for the reduction of loneliness through creative expression for a variety of impacted populations.

- Catalyze and conduct further research into how to most effectively and creatively reduce the burden of loneliness for millions of Americans.

MEN DON'T TALK FACE TO FACE. WE TALK SHOULDER TO SHOULDER.

The US Men’s Sheds Association is a national 501(c)3 Non-Profit Association committed to breaking the cycle of social isolation and loneliness facing men. Local Community Centers, Activity Centers and Seniors groups find it a great way to create new activities to add to their existing programs, to help retired, senior men become active again.  

https://usmenssheds.com/
ARE YOU OR A LOVED ONE AT RISK FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION?
FIND OUT.

LATEST UPDATES

Self-Assessment: Is Isolation Affecting Me?

Connected Communities: A voice for every community housing resident

Sign Up for Text Reminders to Keep in Touch With Loved Ones
Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Living Communities (SPARK Kit) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Centers from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Administration on Community Living
The real world is calling

Attend local events to meet people, try something new, or do more of what you love.

Search

Events near Columbia, MD

See all

https://www.meetup.com/Second-Half-Rally-Active-Recreation-for-Fun-People/events/265147576/
Start With Hello Week: September 23-27, 2019

Want a fun, free and easy way to create a culture of inclusion that values each individual at your school?... Start With Hello! This program teaches students to make a difference with their peers in a simple, fun, and impactful way. They take small but powerful actions to promote connectedness and inclusion, and to identify and help lonely students who are showing signs of social isolation.

Social isolation is the overwhelming feeling of being left out, lonely or treated like you are invisible. Young people who feel this way may pull away from society, struggle with learning and social development, or choose to hurt themselves or others.
What is Social Isolation?

_Beyond Differences is dedicated to ensuring that every child in middle school feels accepted, included and valued by their peers no matter what their difference._
Connection

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.

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For a copy of the slides:

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