

LONELINESS

Recent surveys suggest that as many as 25% of all adults experience painful loneliness as least once every month.

Loneliness is a part of life we all experience. It is the painful awareness of not feeling connected to others. While it can be a time of sadness, anxiety, and emotional discomfort, it can also be an opportunity for personal growth if we are willing to learn more about the source of our loneliness.

Because many of us have been taught to fear loneliness, few of us know how to experience the positive aspects of these feelings, which are also real and of value.

Often being alone is confused with loneliness. We can feel lonely while alone, in a relationship, or in a crowd. We can also be alone without experiencing feelings of loneliness.

When we experience loneliness our tendency is to flee from these feelings and seek solace in others or in things. We may find ourselves drawn to one or more of the many ways society offers as an escape. These can include- over indulgence in alcohol or other drugs, overeating, gambling, too much TV viewing, excessive exercise, or the perpetual search for that someone whose love will rescue us from our loneliness. None of these are solutions.

We need to accept that fact that at times we are alone in life. Feelings of loneliness can help us identify what is important to us as individuals. Learning to be fulfilled while alone is fundamental to dealing with loneliness. When we more clearly identify our needs, we can then move more confidently in directions that turn painful loneliness into insightful solitude.

One way to reduce loneliness is by experiencing the serenity inherent in personal independence whether we are in a relationship or not. Personal independence encourages us to be creative.

Loneliness After Loss

Loneliness is a normal reaction to loss. Sometimes we feel lonely after the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, when experiencing nostalgia, or when an illness results in reduced capabilities or exclusion from some activities.



After a loss we may feel abandoned and avoid getting close to others and subsequently feel alone. This can be exacerbated by previous experiences where we have felt rejected and hurt.

Solitude can be a period of openness with no expectations. It can allow us to take a breath between different phases of our lives. If we take full advantage of this in-between period to process and heal we can then concentrate on new activities and experiences feeling refreshed and ready.

What Can You Do On Our Own

To overcome loneliness and regain a positive attitude, we can-

Explore what you have in common with others. We are all pretty much the same.

Expand the number of people whom you can call on, recognizing that no one person can meet all our needs. Relying on only a few people puts too much pressure on everyone.

Demonstrate the qualities someone would value in us as a friend as often as opportunity permits.

Take an interest in others. Ask others questions about themselves. Everyone appreciates a good listener and someone who is responsive.

Make sure you use your time both productively and enjoyably when alone.

Take the initiative and practice your social skills. Do not wait for others to make plans and include us.

Learn to express genuine concern about the welfare of others. Volunteering (contributing time and talents) is a great way to feel connected.

Examine your values and do not judge everyone by your past experience. Give people a chance.

Open up to a family member or friend. Self-disclosure helps to develop connections with others.

Be assertive. By taking responsibility for your feelings of loneliness, developing independence, and using time alone to enjoy yourself, you can change how you feel.

Work on changing things about yourself (negative thinking or habitual sarcastic remarks) that make it hard for you to find and keep friends. Rude people stay lonely longer.



Myths About Loneliness

- **Being alone creates loneliness** - It is true that when alone we will at times be unhappy, as there are fewer distractions and we are more likely to dwell on negative thoughts.

If we are willing to examine our thoughts and feelings, we can gain more control and learn to become more comfortable when alone. In fact, spending time alone is one way of dealing with loneliness.

- **When we are lonely we should try to meet more people** - It is true that pursuing new acquaintances will temporarily occupy our mind, not allowing our feelings to surface.

When people are not there, loneliness will return. Temporary distractions do not solve our loneliness.

- **People need people** - It is true that we need to connect and learn to become open and intimate with others.

If we need to be with others in order to feel good about ourselves, we have lost our independence and given control of our own happiness to someone else.

Help Is Available

Most of us work on relieving loneliness only when we are discontent. For some of us, however, it is a more continuous process and our participation in individual or group therapy can help us learn how to better connect with others.

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com