Aging with Resilience: Combating Loneliness and Enhancing Your Mental Health

Dr. Dara Bliss Schwartz
Clinical Psychologist
A season of loneliness and isolation is when the caterpillar gets its wings. Remember that next time you feel alone.

Mandy Hale
THE STATE OF LONELINESS TODAY

In 2018, Cigna conducted a large national online survey of U.S. adults to explore the impact of loneliness and found that loneliness was at epidemic levels.

N = 20,096

Nearly half report sometimes or always feeling alone

Those who live with others are less likely to be lonely

Generation Z (those age 18-22) is currently rated the loneliest generation — they actually claim to be in worse health than older generations

For more information, please visit Cigna.com/CombattingLoneliness
The COVID Complication
CDC: Mental Health Impact of COVID

- Anxiety: 2019 vs. 2020
- Depression: 2019 vs. 2020
- Suicidal Ideation: 2019 vs. 2020
The Inequities of COVID

Latino and Black people, women, and people with lower incomes are most at risk of mental health concerns because of the pandemic.

Percent of respondents who reported experiencing stress, anxiety, or great sadness that they found difficult to cope with on their own since the COVID-19 pandemic began.
Those Reporting Loneliness Are Much More Likely To Report Poor Mental and Physical Health

Percent who say they...

- People reporting loneliness or social isolation
- People not reporting loneliness or social isolation

United States

- Have a debilitating disability or chronic disease: 40% (14%)
- Have been told by a medical professional that they have a serious mental health condition: 47% (15%)

United Kingdom

- Have a debilitating disability or chronic disease: 36% (17%)
- Have been told by a medical professional that they have a serious mental health condition: 40% (18%)

Japan

- Have a debilitating disability or chronic disease: 20% (9%)
- Have been told by a medical professional that they have a serious mental health condition: 28% (4%)

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation/The Economist Survey on Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan (conducted April-June 2018)

Figure 3: Those Reporting Loneliness Are Much More Likely to Report Poor Mental and Physical Health
Why does loneliness do so much damage?
Loneliness and Health Risks

Loneliness can be a precursor to...

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Heart Attack
- Stroke
- Hypertension
- Immune Complications
- Type 2 Diabetes
Loneliness and Substance Use: A Vicious Cycle

Sometimes loneliness can lead to addiction. Other times it can result from it. In either case it’s a slippery slope and dangerous relationship where one feeds the other if you’re not careful.
Loneliness and Older Adult Mental Health

- Increased risk of MCI and dementias
- Correlates with depression and anxiety
- Can correlate to suicidal ideation in older age
Am I Lonely?  
Measuring Loneliness:

Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (R-UCLA)
• Designed to be self administered
• 20 items
• Questions about: companionship, loneliness and isolation
• Rated on scale of: never, rarely, sometimes often

3 Item Loneliness Scale
• Designed to be administered over phone
• 3 items
• Rated on scale of: hardly ever, some of the time, often
So...How Would You Rate?

First, how often do you feel you lack companionship?
1 [ ] Hardly ever
2 [ ] Some of the time
3 [ ] Often

How often do you feel left out?
1 [ ] Hardly ever
2 [ ] Some of the time
3 [ ] Often

How often do you feel isolated from others?
1 [ ] Hardly ever
2 [ ] Some of the time
3 [ ] Often
Other Signs You Might Be Lonely:

- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Losing interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Becoming emotionally and physically exhausted
- Experiencing changes in appetite, weight or both
- Feeling blue, hopeless and helpless
- Experiencing changes in sleep patterns

- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm behaviors
- Memory and cognitive complaints
- Being irritable
- People may avoid social situations, stay home, go back to bed or go to sleep

Clusters of these symptoms may indicate the presence of depression or anxiety.
Strategies for Navigating Loneliness:
It starts with your thoughts…

Change your thoughts and change your world
Norman Vincent Peale
Take a Balanced Perspective

Only you can change your lens of perception...
Common Humanity

It's Not Just You!
When it comes to feeling lonely...
Lonely Behaviors: Where Lonely and Alone can join

Feel Lonely
Do Less/Isolate
(For Older Adult: Memory Impaired, Concentration Impaired)
Feel Lonelier
Do Even Less

Feel Even more connected
Do More
Feel a Little less lonely
Do Something
Lastly: Do Your GRAPES

G: Gratitude
R: Relaxation
A: Accomplishment
P: Pleasure
E: Exercise
S: Socializing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gratitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relaxation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accomplishment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pleasure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Summary

• Loneliness is an epidemic within a pandemic
• Loneliness has dire physiological and mental health consequences
• There are things YOU can do to help decrease the feelings of loneliness
• Loneliness is a feeling and everyone feels alone sometimes

Sharp Mesa Vista Hospital offers a variety of services, classes and programs. For more information visit sharp.com/mesavista or call 858-836-8434.
Thank You