

LONELINESS (10 SO 4) "DRAFT"

(by Magdy Rizk 28 August 2002)

The following is a very rough draft.

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REFERENCES:

http://www.cyh.com/cyh/youthtopics/usr_index0.stm?topic_id=1398

<http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/ds/hp911/hp911.html#point1>

MEMORY VERSE

Mat 11:28 "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Mat 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Mat 11:30 "For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

MAIN POINTS

- i. Explain the difference between Loneliness and Solitude
- ii. Explain how loneliness is becoming increasingly common in today's society
- iii. Explain the problems associated with Loneliness
- iv. The importance of spending time in Solitude for spiritual growth and communion with God
- v. Provide a solution / way out of the problem.

SERVANT'S SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Consider times in the servant's own life when they felt lonely, particularly during the teenage years. The reasons for it.

Observe people throughout the week (eg at work) who you may think are loners or those you suspect in the privacy of their own homes feel lonely – why they might be like this and the effect it is having/had on their lives. If you are not already doing so, offer them friendship.

Consider children in your class you are serving, are any of them in this category? If so, pray and be a friend to them.

INTRODUCTION

"It is strange to be known so universally, and yet to be so lonely." These poignant words spoken by the great scientist Albert Einstein demonstrate that loneliness invades the lives of the intellectual as well as those in lower stations of life. It is no respecter of persons. But it may have been Einstein's very brilliance that isolated him from lesser mortals and gave birth to his loneliness.

In a poll conducted among patients in a psychiatric hospital, almost **80 percent** claimed that it was loneliness that drove them to seek help from the psychiatrist. It is small wonder that in his book *Overcoming Loneliness*, David Jeremiah termed it "the disease of the decade, perhaps of every decade in our mid and late twentieth century."

Human beings are social beings that need each other. Without regular and positive contact most of us feel lonely. Feeling lonely can be a depressing or scary feeling. For some it happens every now and then. For others it can become our most regular friend or enemy!

Research has repeatedly shown that the topic of greatest importance to people today is that of *loneliness*. Regrettably, children are not immune from this disease. The sense of loneliness and, consequently, helplessness is the root cause driving many youth today to suicide.

Hence, the topic needs to be dealt with sensitively. There will almost certainly be children in the class who will be suffering from a sense of loneliness to various degrees. The thrust of the lesson should be:

- ❖ It is **normal** to feel lonely at times
- ❖ The danger is how we cope during these periods so that they are healthy experiences through which we grow
- ❖ Loneliness is a symptom of a weak relationship with God, poor self image and negative habits
- ❖ Loneliness needs to be combated on two levels.
 - i. Firstly, accepting God as my Lord and Saviour who loves me (demonstrated by the fact that He died for me) and is willing to forgive me no matter what I did, provided I confess. And, that God is willing and able to resolve any problem. No problem is too big nor too small (*"Don't tell God you have a big problem, tell your problem you have a big GOD"*).
 - ii. I must take action to change my habits that foster the negative feelings of loneliness. This may mean getting help to improve self image, support in addressing the source of loneliness (eg family having moved to a new location and associated problems with settling in etc).
- ❖ If people do feel lonely, they should NOT be ashamed nor feel guilty. But rather, share the feeling with someone with experience and wisdom who can help (eg servant, priest).

The appendix at the end of the lesson "Loneliness – Child & Youth Health" provides additional material.

As part of the introduction, conduct a poll to gauge how the class may rate the significance in their lives of the topic of loneliness. This could perhaps be done by handing out a sheet and have them rate (1 Most important - 11 least important) what they see as being the most important issues for teens today:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|---------------------------|
| A | Loneliness | A | Social Acceptance |
| A | Fear | A | sexuality |
| A | worry | A | Boyfriends / Girlfriends |
| A | study | A | peace at home |
| A | drugs | A | bullying / discrimination |
| A | Other | | |

DEFINITION

Loneliness is more readily experienced than defined. The Webster's Dictionary definition is, "*Being without company; cut off from others; not frequented by human beings; sad from being alone; producing a feeling of bleakness or desolation.*" Taken together, these concepts combine to describe a dismal yet painfully common experience. It is not without reason that *loneliness* has been termed the most desolate word in the English language. Its very sound seems to echo its own desolation.

Loneliness assumes many forms, each equally undesirable--an unsatisfied inner ache, an inner vacuum, a craving for satisfaction. The human heart has an insatiable longing to be loved.

One of the frequent side effects is a sense of emptiness and futility that nothing seems to dispel. Contemporary social and environmental factors are often the villain of the piece. For older people, the breaking up of the family home, with the consequent loss of familiar friends and scenes, can prove a traumatic experience. They feel rootless and find it desperately difficult to strike up a new relationship in strange surroundings.

It is no sin to be lonely, so there is no need to add a sense of guilt to the problem. Our sinless Lord was lonely. But if the facts of the case are not faced realistically and purposefully, harmful attitudes may develop that will hinder present enjoyment of life and fruitful service for God and man in the future.

SOLITUDE v"s LONELINESS

While there are points of similarity between solitude and loneliness, it is quite wrong to equate them without qualification. It is true that the two at times do converge, but neither the words nor the experience are synonymous.

The word *alone* occurs frequently in the Bible, but only in very few cases can it be equated with loneliness. Our Lord differentiated the two concepts when He said, "*You will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me*" (Jn. 16:32).

The different significance of the two words has been expressed in this way: **Loneliness** is the result of the absence of personal intimacy or meaningful activity. **Solitude** is not being in the company of others.

Loneliness is always a negative experience, while solitude is often positive and renewing. Loneliness brings a feeling of desolation and depression that can be destructive. It tends to stifle hope and quench aspiration. Solitude can generate a sense of solitariness that is both creative and motivating. The one is involuntary, unwanted. The other is voluntary and deliberately chosen.

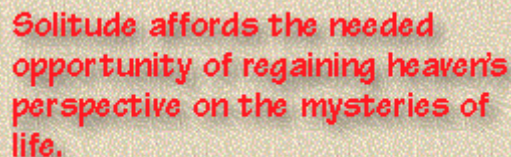
Isolation was the first thing God saw that was not good: *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (Gen. 2:18). But there are times when the hard-pressed heart craves solitude more than anything else.

Following His claim that isolation was not good for Adam, God created *"a helper suitable for him."* So early in human history, God indicated that mankind was made for companionship. We were created social beings, capable of sustaining loving and congenial relationships with both God and our fellow men and women. Our full creative purpose can never be realized by itself, only in association with other men and women. Because we are social creatures by nature, the absence of a friend or companion creates an emotional vacuum that can work havoc on both body and spirit.

Being alone involves only physical separation, but being lonely includes both spiritual and psychological isolation. It produces a solitude of heart, the feeling of being cut off from others whom we should like to have as friends.

A certain degree of solitude--being alone with one's thoughts--is a normal state. It is essential to the cultivation of the inner life. We all experience times when it becomes essential to escape what Thomas Gray called "the madding crowd's ignoble strife" and engage in constructive introspection. Without such periodic physical withdrawal, the spiritual life will lack depth and freshness. In such a period of solitude we will find a welcome alternative to the rat race of modern life.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SOLITUDE



Solitude affords the needed opportunity of regaining heaven's perspective on the mysteries of life.

Periods of solitude can equip us to help others. Our Lord's frequent desire for solitude was not for the mere sake of being alone; it was primarily to enjoy communication with His Father. Then, strengthened and encouraged by that fellowship, He returned better equipped to meet the demands of the needy and lonely crowds that constantly pursued Him.

Solitude affords the needed opportunity of regaining heaven's perspective on the mysteries of life. This was the experience of Asaph, who opened his heart and shared his perplexity in Psalm 73.

As he surveyed the world around him and observed the prosperity of the wicked people among whom he moved, he almost lost his faith. He was mystified that God should allow them to prosper and profit by their evil deeds, while often the good people appeared to have more than their share of adversity and suffering. Was God really being fair by acting that way? In the light of His seeming injustice, Asaph had begun to wonder about the point and profit of being righteous. Hear Asaph as he pours out his complaint:

As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. . . . This is what the wicked are like--always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood (Ps. 73:2-5,12-13,16-17).

It wasn't until he went into the silence of the sanctuary of God that he gained heaven's perspective and found a fresh foothold for his faith.

He identified Himself so thoroughly with our humanity that He experienced acute loneliness--one of the sinless infirmities that He voluntarily assumed at the incarnation. It was no surprise to Him when His disciples

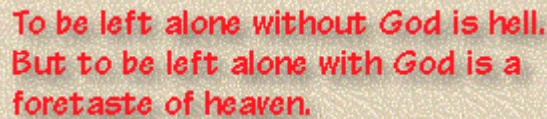
all forsook Him and fled. Had He not already forewarned them of that danger? And they deserted Him in His hour of greatest need. But in that darkest hour of His loneliness, He confessed His unshaken confidence in His Father's abiding presence:

"You will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me" (Jn. 16:32).

This joyous fact more than compensated for the absence of human companionship. He knew the ultimate panacea for loneliness, and so may we.

Let the desolate soul take comfort from the fact that God is just as present with His lonely children today as He was with His Son. But it is only as we believe and appropriate that fact that we will enjoy the blessing and benefit of His conscious presence.

TRANSFORMING LONELINESS INTO SOLITUDE



To be left alone without God is hell.
But to be left alone with God is a
foretaste of heaven.

The negative state of loneliness can be transformed into a growing experience if we have the right attitude and trust in God.

"So Jacob was left alone" (Gen. 32:24). These words have a plaintive ring about them. But in the encounter that ensued, Jacob discovered to his great surprise that he was alone with the very God who, for two decades, had been pursuing him with undiscouraged ardor, with the sole purpose of blessing him. And now he had painted himself into a corner.

To soften up the brother he had so shamefully defrauded, Jacob had sent on ahead his wife, children, and flocks, together with lavish presents for Esau. And now he was all alone!

How he dreaded the hour of confrontation with his brother! Little did he dream that this unplanned hour of solitude would be fraught with unimagined blessing. He had to learn that God never gives up in His desire to bless His erring children.

The words *left alone* can hold different connotations to different people. For some they spell longed-for rest and quietness, for others only aching loneliness. To be left **alone without God** is hell. But to be left **alone with God** is a foretaste of heaven.

It was only when Jacob the deceiver was shut up alone with God that he was transformed into Israel the prince, who now had power with God and man. What marvelous grace on God's part! One could conceive of our generous God granting him the privilege of having influence with his fellow men. This would be an incredible expression of divine forgiveness and restoration. But to have power with God? Only a God as great and as gracious as our God could have conceived such an act of love and grace.

SEEDS OF LONELINESS

It is rather surprising to discover that despite its universality in past ages as well as in our own, loneliness is nowhere treated at length in the Bible. Illustrations of its ravages, however, abound. The Scriptures alone provide us with a credible and authentic diagnosis of mankind's fundamental problems, so it must be to the Bible that we look for both diagnosis and cure.

The biblical record asserts that in his original state, Adam was perfect in form and intelligence.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. . . . God saw all that He had made, and it was very good (Gen. 1:27,31).

Although he came perfect from the hand of God, Adam was still finite and incomplete. This is implicit in the first recorded statement from the mouth of God.

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." . . . So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man (Gen. 2:18,21-22).

In their original innocence, Adam and Eve lived without shame or fear. They enjoyed uninhibited companionship with each other and with the Lord God. They were neither alone nor lonely.

Into this ideal scene the serpent subtly introduced himself and successfully seduced them into sin. This, in turn, resulted in the forfeiture of their perfection and innocence, for it was an act of rebellion against their Creator and Benefactor. From then on they were fallen beings, and involved the whole human race in their fall. But though the image of God in them was sadly defaced, it was not totally obliterated. In that pregnant moment loneliness was born.

The immediate result of their sin and folly was banishment from the Garden of Eden. From then on they were enmeshed in the tentacles of fear and gripped by the icy fingers of loneliness. Tragic exchange! Desolating loneliness for intimacy with God!

MANKIND'S TWOFOLD NEED

People were created with a twofold need--fellowship with God and companionship with other human beings. For these, if they are to realize the full purpose of His creation, there can be no substitute. The social instinct is deep within every human being, and when this need remains unsatisfied the seeds of loneliness grow and flourish.

We are vulnerable to the onslaught of loneliness on a number of levels, of which the emotional is the most distressing because it involves the loss of close relationship with other people. It can be relieved only by establishing some alternative, congenial association. To those who are by nature shy or reserved, this presents an almost insurmountable obstacle.

Social loneliness is related to the contacts we have--or do not have--with the community in which we live. This is a chronic sense of being "left out," and this in turn generates a feeling of low self-worth. The victim labors under the conviction, by no means always justified, that he or she is of little significance to anyone, and therefore no one desires his or her friendship. This attitude often leads to a largely self-imposed isolation.

What people in this state of mind need most is a group of caring and supportive friends; but how and where can they find them But the initial step--the joining of such a group--is the decision of the sufferer.

Although social loneliness is undoubtedly distressing, spiritual loneliness is even more fundamental to the condition, for it carries with it the feeling of isolation not only from fellow men and women but from the God who alone can fill the vacuum in the human heart.

Blaise Pascal, the noted French scientist, held that in every human heart there exists a God-shaped vacuum. Centuries before him, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, put his finger on the root cause of loneliness. He said, ***"God created man for Himself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him."***

For this reason, the greatest need of the lonely person is to ensure that he or she is in a right relationship with God, the Great Physician. He has a cure for every lack and disorder of the human heart, whether it be spiritual or social.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

It is imperative that we seek forgiveness for our sins and, consequently, to learn to forgive ourselves.

Ultimately, every one of us must face reality and take responsibility for our condition. It is our personal loneliness, and for it we have final responsibility. So if any change is to be effected, it is we who must take the initiative. If we choose to deny responsibility and blame others for it, the prospect for release is dim. We must cease blaming parents, environment, or other people or circumstances, or there can be no effective strategy for conquering the affliction. There is good hope for release when we accept that, in the end, we and no one else are responsible to create the conditions for change.

When we come to God in true penitence, He is very gracious. We need entertain no fear of rebuff or rejection, no matter how unworthy we feel and are. His attitude to His failing children is beautifully exhibited in His revelation of Himself to Moses when he prayed, ***"Now show me Your glory" (Ex. 33:18).***

And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ***"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin" (Ex. 34:6-7).***

A gift does not become ours until we appropriate it. God freely offers forgiveness for all our sin, and acceptance of that forgiveness is another important milestone on the road to restoration. Lonely people tend to be self-condemnatory. They see in their condition some real or imaginary fault of their own for which they find it hard to forgive themselves.

But if our holy God is willing, for Christ's sake, to forgive us on the basis of our confession, then surely we can forgive ourselves for the sins He has forgiven. Hear His assuring words: ***"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12).***

http://www.cyh.com/cyh/youthtopics/usr_index0.stm?topic_id=1398

Appendix 1. LONELINESS – CHILD & YOUTH HEALTH

Human beings are social beings that need each other. Without regular and positive contact most of us feel lonely. Feeling lonely can be a depressing or scary feeling. For some it happens every now and then. For others it can become our most regular friend or enemy! This topic looks at loneliness, health and what you might do to make some changes in your life.

I'M SO LONELY!

Everyone faces loneliness from time to time. It comes in many forms. It is usually when you have little contact with people. It can also be when you feel you have little importance or value in other people's lives. Or when the people you are with see things very differently from you. If you feel lonely for a long time it can bring with it a deep and long-term feeling of thinking everything is useless and isolation (thinking you are separate or different from everyone else).

"I was going through a hard time when I lived alone. I would lie staring at my roof. I'd think to myself, anything could happen to me right now and no one would know. I hated the silence and played my stereo really loud just to feel like I had some company. It felt like I lived in my own silent little box with four boring walls. I seemed that outside of my box the world was happening and I wasn't a part of it."
Jane 23 years old.

Loneliness and depression seem to be very closely linked. Sometimes loneliness can be confused with depression. *Depression can also bring about feelings of loneliness. If you feel overwhelmed with loneliness or depression talk to your doctor or priest or servant.*

ISOLATION

Often we feel lonely because we feel separate or isolated from other people or the community in which we live. There are many different reasons why you might feel isolated or lonely. Here are some examples.

The way things are where you live.

- Physical or geographic isolation can separate you from other people.
- Discrimination or harassment because of your race, gender, religious beliefs, intellectual or physical ability, looks etc. This can make you feel separate from others.

"At school I always got teased for being fat. The kids never left me alone. They would pinch my lunch, push me around and call me things like "lard arse, fatso and Dumbo". At home I'd lock myself in my room. I didn't ever want to go out because I thought I looked so horrible. I thought no one in the world would like me. I didn't even like myself. As I got older my body shape changed but the feeling still followed me. When I met a person for the first time I thought they wouldn't like me and all they saw was someone weak, ugly and disgusting. I didn't bother trying to make any friends. I hated myself and I didn't trust anyone. I was alone."
Jason 17 years old.

- Moving to a new place. This can be especially difficult if people speak a different language, have different customs or cultural expectations to you.

"It is really hard to make friends because you can't speak the same language."

"My parents don't let me go out. They don't understand the different culture here in Australia. They are

scared for me."

"It is scary because if something goes wrong, for example a fire at home, you cannot explain the problem to someone."

15 year old student.

- Lack of opportunities to "get involved". Things like high rates of unemployment, lack of money, having children (being a young parent you may also face undue criticism or judgement) or lack of affordable recreation places in a community can mean you spend most of your time at home.

"Life tends to get a bit grey after a while, you just sort of sit and you're looking at the same four walls day in and day out. It (your life) just gets smaller and smaller."

Young Person, Surviving Unemployment Project

- You have been removed from your parent by the courts, your parents have divorced or you (or a parent) have moved away.

"I worked with teenagers who had been removed from living with their parents, usually for child abuse. It would sadden me to see many of these young people trying everything possible to get back to their parents or to be loved and noticed. They would do things like run away, hurt themselves or others and hook up with people who then took advantage of their feeling of loneliness. Other kids lived with their parents but felt desperately lonely because they never felt they were accepted, valued or loved. It made me realise how important it is for all of us to feel like we belong, we are connected to someone and we are a lovable person. It makes sense that the young people that I had contact with would try these things. I admire their strength and spirit."

Community Health Worker

The way you think about yourself and other people

- You feel you have little to share with others - so you don't bother!
- You don't like yourself - it's hard to believe others will like you if you don't!
- You criticise or judge yourself - we can be our own harshest critics!
- You don't trust people - this can be especially difficult if you've had an experience of abuse or violence. We have topics on these for further information.
- You are embarrassed or ashamed of yourself - you might feel guilty, dirty, ugly or stupid. These feelings tell you that you are not a worthwhile person and that no-one will want to care for you or be your friend. These feelings too can be the result of an experience of abuse, harassment or forms of violence. We have topics on these for further information.
- You feel "different to other people". This comes with living in a world where certain "ways of being" have come to be expected. You might feel isolated if you cannot celebrate or show part of your identity. For example if you are gay, have personal religious or spiritual beliefs or because of your skin colour.
- You have a mental health condition that makes it difficult for you to get out or mix with other people. Eg Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Schizophrenia, ADD/ADHD etc.

What things in your life contribute to your feeling of loneliness?

LONELINESS AND HEALTH

Loneliness can become a health problem when it is in your life for a long time and joins forces with things like:

- Depression
- Self harming or suicidal thoughts
- Drugs, tobacco and alcohol
- Anxiety or fear
- Anger

- Violence
- Prostitution
- Criminal Activity
- Mental illness

These are all things that many of us come into contact with at different times of our life. They become a problem when they become stronger with the help of loneliness.

For example some people smoke or use drugs or alcohol because they feel lonely. Sometimes it can become something they need all the time. Not only can this reduce possibilities of making new friends, it can mean losing the ones they had. A turn off for new friends is the smelly clothes, bad breath and dull looking skin that cigarette smoking can do to you. This can lead to feeling lonelier. The vicious circle takes control and they lose control of your life.

Long term loneliness can become a real health problem for many people.

How does loneliness affect you?

MAKING LINKS WITH OTHERS

Why am I a loner?
13 year old student

While there are many things that contribute to loneliness ***the hardest thing to do is identify and face how you contribute to your loneliness.*** The first thing you might like to ask yourself is:

What things do you do that keep loneliness in your life?

For example:

- I stay home by myself all the time. I don't go out anywhere.
- I let myself believe I am ugly, stupid, boring and no one will like me.
- I tell myself no one understands me. In fact, no one *will ever* understand me.
- I spend all my money on dope/alcohol and then can't afford to do anything else.
- I always get scared and don't try any thing new. That includes meeting new people or doing new things.
- I let other people boss me around and tell me: who I am, and what I can do.
- I tell myself I am a black sheep and I will never fit in.
- I think there is something wrong with me.

Once you have looked at what you do to contribute you can look at the things you might like to change. Some people like to write a list or a plan about what they will do. Set yourself some goals. Think about what you do and don't have control over (eg. you can't change what other people do, you can change what you do!). Pin it up. Add to it. Take things away (it is always OK to change your mind). Try some new things out. Take a risk.

It can take time and energy to replace "loneliness" with involvement and "isolation" with a sense of community. Loneliness can be a big and overwhelming thing. Big and overwhelming things don't disappear easily. The way they do disappear is if you chip at them bit by bit. Taking off little bits at a time can slowly help you to feel better.

MORE TIPS

Here are some ideas of what other people have done to change loneliness by involvement and isolation by joining a community.

- Skills like assertiveness, conflict resolution, negotiation and problem solving can challenge the feelings of loneliness

if it has crept into your life. We have topics on these on this site. (If you join a group to learn about these you will meet people as well.)

- Make a list of what is contributing to your loneliness. How might you change your relationship with these things? How might you build new things into the relationship? Remember you can't change other people. Think about the choices you have control over.
- Put your fear aside and take a risk. Phone that person you have been putting off for ages. Invite a new person over for dinner. Go, when you are asked to a party.
- If you are experiencing an abusive situation, tell someone you trust. Check out our other topics such as Relationship Violence or Child Abuse.
- If you have been violent or abusive towards others see our topic on Violence or Relationship Violence. Think about the behaviours that you might choose that build safe, caring and trusting relationships in your life.
- Tell someone you trust how you are feeling. Talk to a trained counsellor (you can do this over the phone without even saying who you are!).
- Find groups of people where you hold a common interest. For example join a sporting club, do a short course, or visit a support group.
- Be open to others' opinions and views. Try and see things from another person's point of view. Remember you can learn from every person you meet! Let them know you are interested in them. [But don't try too hard at first. Just be friendly without asking for too much too soon]
- Connect with other people through volunteer work or becoming involved in other community projects. There are lots of people out there who feel just like you!

Overall think about what is best for you. Take control of what you can. Put energy into the things you can change. Take a risk (meaning move out of your "comfort zone") that will improve your life.

HELP OTHERS TOO!

Know someone who is lonely? Do you see Susie spend lunch alone every day? Think about how she might feel. We can all help each other feel welcome and included. We are all part of the one community and we can all help each other.

- Be open to others' opinions, views and ways of living. Try and see things from other people's point of view.
- Allow, accept and celebrate difference. Check out our topic on Diversity And Discrimination In Australia.
- Remember you can learn from every person you meet! Let them know you are interested in them and their life.
- Invite someone new to your party or to your house to watch a movie.
- Be aware of how loneliness might feel. Tell others about what you think.
- Show someone that you care. Visit someone you know is lonely. Take them some flowers. Send someone a card or letter.

What else can you think of? What do you already do?

Other related topics

[BOREDOM](#)

[DEPRESSION](#)

[DRUGS AND ALCOHOL - GENERAL](#)

[SUICIDE](#)

[CHILD ABUSE](#)

[RAPE](#)

[RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE](#)

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