

## ***Living with Loneliness***

Loneliness is feeling empty inside. It is a feeling of separateness and isolation. It is a feeling of being out of touch with other human beings.

Loneliness can occur when a person does not have someone to depend on, a close family, a group of friends, or relationships with people at work or school. A person can be lonely even when surrounded by other people. We can feel lonely when there is a lack of intimacy in our relationships.

Loneliness occurs at all stages of our life. We may have felt it during our teenage years, as a new parent, when the children left home. Perhaps we never found Mr. or Ms. “Right,” or maybe we experienced the pain of divorce or the death of a spouse. Loneliness can be transitory and ebbs and flows during our lifetime.

Different times of year often make lonely people even lonelier. It sometimes even causes feelings of loneliness in people who have many relationships.

You can learn to live with your loneliness by taking a proactive approach to it. The following are some ideas that might help. Keep an open mind as you read them. If you find yourself shaking your head and telling yourself you can’t possibly do something about your loneliness, realize that only you can change the way you feel. If you don’t like feeling lonely choose to take action to change.

1. **Accept** the reality of your loneliness. It is neither something to be ashamed of nor something to hide. Everyone, at some point in her life, has periods of loneliness—some people accept it, others try to deny it. Accepting it is the first step to finding some relief.
2. **Express** your loneliness. You may do it through tears or by writing your feelings. Expressing your loneliness to yourself can often give you insight as to what is causing it.
3. **Question** whether you need help in dealing with your loneliness. Feelings of “aloneness” can often stem from depression. You may want talk with a therapist or speak with the leader of your religious community about it.
4. **Push** yourself to have contact with others. Call your local community center, church, synagogue, or senior center. Ask for a list of groups and activities. Select one that appeals to you and then make yourself attend a meeting or program. It will feel awkward at first but you won’t be the only person there who doesn’t know anyone. Even if you are, each person there had to come for the first time at one point.
5. **Sign-up** for a class. Most towns and cities have community colleges or recreation centers that offer adult education. Choose a class that interests you—photography, creative writing, bowling, or maybe even French.

6. **Introduce** yourself to someone who also appears alone. If you feel awkward and don't know what to say, pretend you are interviewing that person for a newspaper article. Most people are flattered when someone shows an interest in them.

7. **Suggest** meeting for coffee or attending a concert or play together when you meet someone with whom you feel you have something in common.

8. **Understand** that it takes time to establish intimate relationships and build trust. But, nothing is going to happen until you start.

9. **Volunteer** your talents. Call your local volunteer center to see what services are needed. Choose an activity that brings you in contact with other people. Regularly scheduled time with other people can offer you a respite as you work your way out of your loneliness.

10. **Join** an on-line community. If you have Internet access, find sites of interest to you that have discussion groups. You can read what other people have to say and share your feelings anonymously until you feel safe. Find these at sites like [www.Oxygen.com](http://www.Oxygen.com) or [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) .

11. **Re-connect** with distant relatives or old friends. Plan a reunion with people whom you haven't seen in years. Bring together a group of your old high school buddies or cousins with whom you've lost contact.

12. **Exercise** at a fitness center. There are fitness centers in every price range. Find one that seems to have people your age. Exercise helps ease the feelings of depression. Strike up a conversation with the person on the treadmill next to yours. Meet people during a stretch class or swimming lessons.

13. **Take** a bus trip for single people. Check out <http://www.elderhostel.org> or see if your local community center offers day trips.

Choosing to reach out to another is difficult but the rewards make it worth the effort. If you are ready to address your loneliness and do something about it, congratulate yourself on your willingness to take control of your life and then take the first step.