



Finding Relief from Loneliness -By Cassandra Van Dyck

“In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity.” - Albert Einstein

Many of us are familiar with the risk factors that may impact our quality and length of life. We know that smoking is harmful and that we'll feel better and be less at risk for disease if we eat healthy foods and exercise. However, we may not think as often as we could about our emotional well-being and how it impacts our physical health.

Recent studies have shown that loneliness and social isolation are as just as threatening to longevity as cigarette smoking and obesity. Loneliness has been shown to upset the regulation of cellular process in a way that can predispose you to premature aging. It has been linked with cardiovascular disease and sup-presses the functioning of our immune systems. Statistics show that up to 40% of adults over the age of 65 will experience loneliness.

Perhaps when you think of loneliness, you imagine a person in an empty house in the middle of an open field. The reality is that “not all those who live alone are lonely and not all people who are lonely live alone.” Lots of people who experience chronic loneliness are surrounded by people at work, at home and in public. It is not the quantity of interactions that a person may have that determines their loneliness, but the quality. A person can interact with people all day long, but if they do not feel connected and heard, they may still experience feelings of seclusion.

There are many reasons for prevailing loneliness. Helping other people has numerous benefits, but those benefits are compromised if we are not caring for ourselves as well. We can care for our-selves by reaching out to our communities to make sure we are having positive, quality interactions that combat loneliness and provide feelings of acceptance and joy.

When we feel lonely, it can be hard to imagine feeling differently – especially when we are serving other people and not nurturing ourselves. Sometimes we get used to feeling lonely, unaware of the stress it is causing our bodies and minds. If you or someone you know is struggling with loneliness, here are a few steps you can take to start feeling more connected.

Find the root of your loneliness.

When we are feeling lonely, it can be hard to figure out why or how we ended up in such a state. Take some deep breaths and think or write about what is happening in your life. Are you making time to connect with the people in your life that you spending time with? Have you recently lost someone in your life? Could you use some more support with everything you have going on? Taking the time to think about why you're feeling the way you are can provide the self-awareness needed to start reaching out so you can receive the kind of support you need.

Remember that you are not alone.

Loneliness can lead to strong feelings of isolation, leading one to believe that they are alone and there is no one they could possibly reach out to for help. "Believing that people really are there for you is an important first step." Sometimes just telling a supportive person that you are feeling lonely can take a weight off your shoulders. Try talking to a friend, family member or a professional.

Be social.

This might feel like the hardest thing to do when you are experiencing long periods of loneliness, but it can also be the most beneficial. Try coming to one of our Network Groups or Walk and Talks. Attend a fitness class or accept an invitation to a summer activity. Try something that you've done in the past that has made you feel nourished and rejuvenated.

Make small connections.

Have you ever been having a bad day and then had that mood instantly turned around after a stranger held a door for you, a cashier made eye contact and smiled when you were leaving with your bags, or a co-worker took the time to ask how you were doing? These small connections can be enough to shift our mindsets away from negative thought patterns.

Try positive affirmations.

Loneliness is an emotion. Although it may not always feel so, it can be substituted for another. Try taking some time each morning and evening to set some positive affirmations. These can be spoken silently to yourself, written, or said out loud. Some find it helpful to speak it to themselves in a mirror. If you're stuck for words, try speaking these affirmations from Louise Hay:

"Life supports me in every possible way."

"I experience love wherever I go. Loving people fill my life, and I find myself easily expressing love to others."

"Today I listen to my feelings, and I am gentle with myself. I know that all of my feelings are my friends."

"My day begins and ends with gratitude and joy."

References: www.qeepr.com, www.mind.org.uk, www.psychologytoday.com, www.bridgemaker.com.