



REMEMBER

- Loneliness can create secondary problems, affecting young people physically and psychologically such as depression and increased risk of suicide, poor sleep and its consequences (such as inattention and difficulty processing), risky and even addictive behaviours (meant to soothe and distract from sad feelings), and compromised immune functioning.
- Since childhood offers little experience of being alone, teens enter adolescence with few coping skills to deal with the feelings that come from perceived isolation when they find themselves on their own.
- Part of healthy development for a teen needs to include moving away from the known and into the unknown. This normal process will naturally include a feeling of alienation at some level. Preparing teens with skills to navigate through these expected feelings can greatly ease the impact.
- God has said that he is “near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18). Lonely teens need to know that they have a special place in the heart of God, and their broken heart means something to him.



RECOGNIZE

- Loneliness is not necessarily about being alone. It is a perception - a state of mind - that can be experienced even in the presence of others.
- Over recent years, teenagers and young adults have emerged as the people group that is feeling lonelier than any other age group - including older adults. Young people who experience low self-esteem and self-worth tend to feel lonelier than others.
- Lonely young people often feel un-chosen and unwanted. The reality of comparison between their life and the lives they see online leaves many feeling that they are missing out, left out or pushed out of the socially full life they think they should be living. High usage of social media has been shown to increase feelings of loneliness.
- Because a teen's brain is still maturing, the part that regulates emotions may be unsure how to process the intense negative feelings that come with loneliness. They are still learning to tolerate difficult feelings and problem solve around them so emotions like loneliness can feel all consuming.



RESPOND

The presence of just one trusted adult greatly reduces the impact of severe loneliness. As that person, there are things you can invite lonely young people into:

- **Belonging** - Knowing you have been invited and will be missed is a powerful thing, whether the young person follows through on the invitation or not. Be sure that teens know they have a place, they are expected, and they are noticed.
 - **Giving** - The process of giving actually releases chemicals in the brain that increase bonding, trust and empathy which are instrumental in feelings of attachment. Studies have shown that lonely people actually develop great empathy. Tap into this by connecting them to somewhere where their contribution is needed and valued.
 - **Thinking** - Loneliness comes from perceptions and those are not the same as facts. Help the teen explore what their thoughts are telling them is true about themselves and the story of their life when they feel alone. Hold those thoughts up to alternate ways of interpreting what they see, based in facts and truth. Invite them to imagine how they might feel differently if they chose to believe this alternate perception. Ask about what's holding them back from changing what they believe.
- **Risking** - Initiating connection with others can feel really intimidating - especially if efforts have been met with rejection in the past. Acknowledge it. Then help them brainstorm a plan for small steps that they are able to take toward connections - perhaps with others who may also be feeling lonely.
 - **Coping** - Lonely feelings aren't always something that can be “fixed”. Sometimes life is just lonely. Learning to walk through the loneliness with our hand in God's can shape strong and beautiful things inside. The way through can be made easier by collecting a repertoire of good distractions to take away some of the feelings' power (like drawing, building, listening to music, prayer journaling or walking in nature). Help the teen create their own unique coping list, perhaps using the link below as a starting point.



RESOURCES

positivepsychology.com/coping-skills-worksheets - A wealth of practical ideas and tools for developing coping skills with teens.

childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-who-are-lonely - A practical and helpful article for understanding and approaching conversation with lonely youth.

Jean Twenge - This researcher has studied and written extensively on the link between loneliness and social media with teens. Here's her most recent research.



LONELINESS

lifeteams
resources