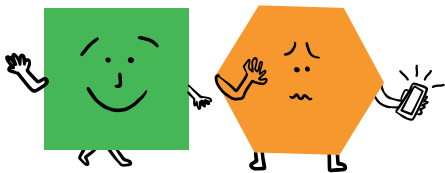


Let's Talk About Loneliness

Loneliness is the feeling of not being cared for, valued or seen by the people around us.

Many people feel lonely, but few talk about it. Talking about loneliness and social isolation can create feelings of embarrassment or shame, so people often avoid it, but they should not.

Asking friends, family members, colleagues and neighbors about these feelings can raise awareness of loneliness, decrease stigma (negative and often unfair beliefs about something or someone) and help all of us feel more connected.



What to Know

- There is no “right way” to talk to others about loneliness, and you do not need special training.
- Loneliness can be invisible. Even people who seem happy can be lonely. Loneliness can also look like depression, stress or another health issue.
- It is never a bad time to ask about loneliness because anyone can experience it at any time.

Conversation Tips

- **Create a safe environment** by sharing your own experiences of loneliness. This helps validate (support the value of) the other person’s feelings. Try saying this: “I’ve had times in my life when I felt lonely. I think most people have, and it helped me to talk to someone else about it.”

- **Take the time to listen.** People who are lonely often feel unheard and misunderstood by others. You can help by listening actively: Give the person your full attention, put down your phone and avoid multitasking. If you are not sure what to say, following up with “Tell me more about that” can help the person feel heard. Small actions, such as nodding your head in agreement, show the person that you are listening.
- **Speak with empathy.** It can be easy to offer advice (“Just put yourself out there!”) or reassurance (“There are lots of ways to meet new people!”), but these methods are not very effective, especially for people who feel down. Instead, try to put yourself in the other person’s place. Do not assume why someone feels lonely — ask.

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

Phrase your questions so they require more than a one-word answer. This will encourage others to share more.

For example:

- “How are things going? I haven’t heard from you as much lately.”
- “You seem down lately. How are you feeling?”
- “I know you have been through a lot of changes recently. That cannot be easy. Are you feeling lonely or isolated?”

- **Ask about barriers to connection.**

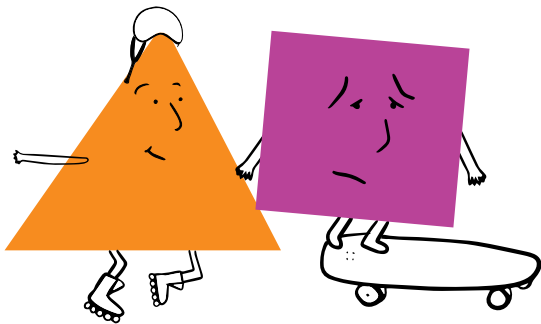
For example:

- “What are some things making it harder for you to connect to others?”
- “Is there anything I can do to help you feel less lonely?”

The person may be experiencing a physical barrier, such as hearing loss or a lack of access to technology, or a relational barrier, such as thinking no one understands them. Identifying and talking about barriers may help address them.

Everyone is different.

Your conversation should be guided by what you know about the other person's unique needs, concerns and beliefs.



Imagining A More Hopeful Future

Feeling lonely can mean feeling hopeless and “stuck.” To help the person imagine a more hopeful future with connection and belonging, try asking these questions:

- “How would you like things to be different?”
- “What helps you feel like you belong and feel connected?”
- “Are there activities you enjoy that you could do with others?”

During your talk, help the person set a realistic goal with a time frame, so you can check in on their progress.

For example:

- “I’m going to say hello to three neighbors this week when I pass them in the hallway.”

- “I’m going to look for a new parent support group to join.
- “Next week, I’m going to try one of the classes at my library.”

After you set a goal, follow up with the person. Ask, “Can I follow up with you to see how it went?” This shows the person that you care about them. Set a reminder for yourself, and make sure to follow up within two weeks. Ask, “How was it? How did you feel?”

Remember that your actions can change how others feel. When others are feeling lonely, hearing from you can make a big difference. It can also make you feel more connected. Together, we can build a stronger and more welcoming community.

If you feel **lonely** all the time,
you might need extra support.

For more support and to speak to a
counselor 24/7, call **888-NYC-WELL**
(888-692-9355), text **WELL** to **65173**
or visit nyc.gov/nycwell. These
services are free and confidential,
and interpretation is available in over
200 languages.

