

BUILD YOUR “CONNECTABILITY”

Living Lonely: The Power of Connection

The challenge of loneliness is that it undercuts your ability to connect with others just when you need it the most. Shifting your mindset is the first step in building up this ability. Identifying where and how you might make connections is another way to strengthen your “connectability.”

Inside-out strategies

Quiet your inner critic: Loneliness can trigger self-defeating thoughts. Challenge yourself to notice these thoughts. Words like “always” or “never” can be clues. To gain a more realistic perspective, imagine how a person who cares about you would respond to your negative self-assessment. “No one likes me,” becomes “Many people care about me, it’s just that something is missing for me right now.” Try to have alternative messages ready for your most common self-defeating thoughts.

Inner critic thought: _____ **More realistic thought:** _____

Question your inner judge: In a self-protective mode, we’re ready to be unsatisfied or rejected by others. We tend to interpret words and actions through this negative lens. Practice instant reality-testing when you notice that you’re making assumptions about others’ thoughts or motives. Could there be another explanation? Try out a neutral thought instead.

› **Recognize** › **Reality-test** › **Replace**

Practice the art of being alone: Spending time alone can help you grow more comfortable with yourself. This can help you to be more open and authentic when you do connect with others. Try it out in small steps: Unplug and go for a walk by yourself. Visit a museum or go to a movie on your own. Dine out or even travel alone. Or simply opt out of company on a regular basis. You may feel some discomfort. Try to ride it out, accepting not judging the experience. Notice aspects of being alone that are appealing.

Going solo goals:

Making moves to connect

Small step stretch goals

Volunteer or activity options

Common ground possibilities

Other ideas

Together, all the way.®



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MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

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To practice being mindful, we get quiet and simply notice what we're experiencing in the moment. It's not as easy as it sounds! Our focus will naturally shift to other thoughts. When they do, we notice and gently bring our focus back to the here and now. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Regular practice has been shown to gradually shift one's stress response. When stressors hit, such as the difficult feelings of loneliness, we're more able to stay calm and keep a realistic perspective. Try for a 10-minute practice each day.

- › Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
- › Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed.
- › Relax your body. Close your eyes if comfortable doing so.
- › Bring your thoughts to what you are experiencing in this moment.
- › Notice the sensations of your body – your feet on the floor, the weight of your arms.
- › Now bring your focus to the natural in and out of your breathing.
- › Take a slow, deep breath. Notice the sensation of the breath entering your body.
- › Slowly exhale. Feel the air travel out of your body.
- › If you like, you can mentally say “calm” as you breathe in and “relax” as you breathe out.
- › Continue to breathe slowly and deeply, focusing on the sensations of your breath.
- › If your mind begins to wander, it's okay. It's normal. Give yourself credit for noticing.
- › Then gently bring your focus back to the sensations of breathing. Redirecting is part of the practice.
- › Imagine other thoughts as clouds drifting across the sky. They will pass. Your breath remains constant.
- › Continue to notice how the air moves in and out of your body and the sensations of your body as it does.
- › When you're ready, take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and open your eyes.

Support a mindful approach throughout your day

Being in the moment: Use everyday cues like taking a first bite of food, putting on your seatbelt, or turning on your computer to take a few calm, mindful breaths and remind yourself to be in the moment.

Managing discomfort: When you are dealing with difficulty, take a quiet moment to consider what remains stable and positive. Try to find at least one thing that is good or that you feel grateful for.

Without judgment: Practice observing without adding a “story” or labels. On a walk or at a stoplight – what do you see, smell, hear? Experience the moment without judging or analyzing anything.

Explore further

There are many sources of guided audio mindfulness practices available online. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Center offers a good place to start: <http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>

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FINDING COMMON GROUND

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Most of us have much more in common with one another than we think. That common ground can be a great place to grow connections. For each question, find someone who matches your status or share thoughts as described in the “share” squares. Try for a vertical or horizontal “bingo” or fill as many squares as you can with different names. Find matches with people whose status you don’t already know.

Share a challenge	Lives in same zip code: You: Who? Where?	Has the same favorite genre of music: You: Who? What type? Favorite artist?	Has a family member who served in military: You: yes / no Who? When?
Shares same position in family birth order: You: Who? What position?	Had car trouble on a trip: You: yes / no Who? Where?	Share a gratitude	Has same pet: You: Who? Pet type and name?
Belongs to club or activity outside of work: You: yes / no Who? What?	Share a compliment	Are more of a lion than a lamb: You: Who? Why do you identify as this?	Prefers fiction vs. non-fiction (books, film, TV) You: Who? Preference and a favorite?
Lives in one’s birth city: You: yes / no Who? If no, where born?	Has same number of children: You: Who? Names and ages:	Enjoys same sport: You: Who? What?	Share a pet peeve

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