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Loneliness & Isolation

	Mental Health Series	
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Loneliness & Isolation

Although loneliness and isolation tend to go hand-in-hand, there are some slight differences. Social isolation is about lacking interactions with other people and can stem from bullying, being excluded, depression, anxiety, and technology addictions. Loneliness is more about feeling sad or a sense of solitude. Both can deeply affect your mental health.

Feelings of Loneliness

If your child seems to have a lot of friends, how can they feel lonely? Everyone has experienced some sense of loneliness, but how do we know when that feeling of loneliness is affecting your child's mental health? Loneliness can worsen depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and cognitive decline. Some contributing factors of loneliness include physical isolation, moving to a new location, the feeling of not fitting in, low self-esteem, history of trauma, being bullied, or even poor parental attachment. Loneliness has to do with the quality of one's relationship and less with the number of friends.

Poor Parental Attachment

If a child feels dismissed, invalidated, or like their needs are not being met by a parent, this can cause an insecure attachment in children. Sadly, those with poor parental attachment believe they do not deserve love or lack the skills needed to feel close to another human being. 66% of adults who said they felt lonely as children still feel lonely today. It is important parents take the time to connect with your child while they are young. The relationships being formed in your child's early years cannot be recreated later in life!

How Can Parents Help

Communication plays a key role when dealing with a lonely child. Keep conversations light, show an interest in your child's friends and ask how they feel about their friends. Openly acknowledge that it's okay to feel lonely at times and this doesn't make them a failure. If your child shares their feelings of loneliness, parents should show empathy by listening, be mindful of the shame they

may be feeling, and create an environment where they can talk openly with you about their feelings. Avoid any suggestion your child may be the one to blame for his or her loneliness. Be aware of their social media usage. Social media usage can be a tool for feeling connected; however, it can also increase feelings of loneliness and isolation as they see their friends doing things without them. Don't be afraid to set limits with their devices. Encourage device free times where your family can enjoy one another's company - play games, go for a walk or a bike ride. Remove negative distractions to allow connections between one another to develop.

Signs of Loneliness

When a young person feels lonely, they may:

- Avoid talking to friends
- Seem quiet or withdrawn for no obvious reason
- Lose their appetite
- Mention they have no one to sit with or play with at school
- Consume themselves with social media but doesn't connect with friends



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Featured articles

Resources to Reach Your Teen

If you are struggling to know how to address hard topics with your teen, check out [MyLifeIsWorthLiving.org](https://mylifewisorthliving.org), which is the first ever, animated series to tackle teen mental health. Designed to start conversations between parents and teens, the series includes five powerful stories told over 20 episodes. In each episode, relatable teen characters wrestle with challenges that are all too familiar for many viewers and discover strategies to cope when it feels like their own thoughts are against them. Over the course of each character's journey, they realize that life is worth living. They don't go it alone. Each character learns that support can come from family, friends, or even people they least expect and that the comfort of a sympathetic person can provide the relief they didn't think possible. As the teens learn to share their burdens, cope in healthy ways, and accept support, that self-critical voice becomes less intrusive, and those bad situations become more hopeful. They learn that life at times can seem bleak, and that negative thoughts are often part of the experience, but also that we all deserve love and support, that no situation is hopeless, and that their lives are worth living.

MY LIFE IS WORTH LIVING™



Recent times have intensified social isolation, and this has been felt deeply in the lives of young people. The CDC reports that the instance of young girls attempting suicide has increased 50% since 2019. Today, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people aged 10 to 24. Every day 500 people in this age group attempt suicide and 20 kids die by suicide. However, research shows that connections to friends, family, and community can be the difference between life and death. The power of storytelling is known to create connections and combat loneliness. Stories can break down the stigma of talking about mental health needs and thoughts of suicide.

Take the time to sit down with your teen and watch any of the 20 animated episodes from My Life Is Worth Living - go to [MyLifeIsWorthLiving.org](https://mylifewisorthliving.org). Each episode provides opportunities for parents to open a conversation with your teen that may be otherwise difficult to approach. Topics include suicide prevention, abuse, trauma, LGBTQ+, bullying, and substance abuse and models for parents healthy ways to interact.

Ways to Strengthen and Preserve Attachment

1. Be available, even at times when your child may not be demanding of your time.
2. Find joy while spending time with your child - exactly as they are.
3. Help your child regulate their emotions - guide them as they experience and learn from emotions.
4. Don't criticize or shut down their feelings.
5. Get involved with your child and what interests them - play with them, at all ages!
6. Set limits and guidelines - don't overschedule your child, place restrictions on devices, monitor out of love and concern, not control.

Works Cited

"7 Reasons You Might Feel Lonely Even though You're Not Alone" Accessed July 15, 2022.

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