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Are You Alone?

10 Tips to Help Ward Off Loneliness

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We all know people who live alone. They may be single or recently widowed. Some people thrive on their own while others experience profound feelings of loneliness. In addition, there are people who are married, caring for others, or living with dementia who may not be alone but feel lonely.

What exactly is loneliness? According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of lonely is solitary, companionless, isolated; unfrequented. Why do some people experience loneliness while others do not? The answer is no doubt complex but we can assume that it's at least partly due to spending great amounts of time alone and without company. Personality also comes into play with how you feel about being alone and whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. An introvert is a person who needs time alone to recharge their battery while an extrovert gains energy from being around others. An introvert is more likely to enjoy longer periods of time alone than an extrovert.

Loneliness can be detrimental in many ways. In addition to the emotional and mental toll it can take, it can also be bad for your physical health. It can put you at risk for high blood pressure, sleep problems, and weight gain. However, being alone doesn't have to be a bad thing nor does it necessarily mean you will be lonely. It can be an opportunity to focus on yourself. For some people dealing with being alone may be easier while for others it may take time and effort to adjust.

Regardless of your situation or personality, almost everyone enjoys being around people from time to time. Depending on your situation and where you are in life, you may find yourself alone more often than you like. In the case of the loss of a spouse, you may find yourself alone for the first time in years. You may be thinking "now what?" How do you fill the hours of the day with purpose and meaningful activity? How do you ward off loneliness?

Here are ten tips for dealing with being alone:

1. Call a friend. Let others know that you welcome a phone call or visit. Sometimes we don't want to bother someone and we end up cutting ourselves off from our network.
2. Don't have friends or family to count on? Research community services. Many organizations offer a daily or weekly phone call or visit from a volunteer.
3. Get a pet. There is lots of evidence to suggest that taking care of a dog, cat, or fish helps to combat loneliness. There is nothing like unconditional love from an animal.

4. Not able to care for a pet? Get some plants. Taking care of another living thing is good for us. There's a reason why your mom or dad talked to the plants.
5. Immerse yourself in a hobby. Have you always wanted to learn how to paint or cook? Now is the time to learn. Share the results with others. Give the painting as a gift to someone. Invite a friend to have dinner with you.
6. Get purposeful. All humans regardless of age need to feel that we have a purpose and are contributing to the world around us. Take care of a grandchild. Walk a neighbor's dog. Contribute to a community cause.
7. Create a daily schedule and goals for yourself. Plan your morning, afternoon, and evening. You will feel in control and it will prevent you from feeling lost with nothing to do.
8. Get online. There are many online communities of people who have common interests. Research the different groups. You may have to try a few out until you find the right fit for you. Skype is also a great tool for connecting with loved ones. Never used a computer? Your local library may have free courses to help you learn.
9. Focus on others. Get out and volunteer. There is always someone who can use your skills and talents. If it's difficult for you to get out, call some local charities and ask if there's something you can do from the comfort of your home.
10. Take time for self-care. Learn to meditate. Do gentle exercises. Plan healthy meals and snacks. Get regular check-ups from your doctor.

If you know someone who is alone, include them in your plans. Invite them to dinner. Drop in with a coffee. Check if they need help with errands or tasks around the house. Ask how they're feeling. Let's be kind to one another and strive to make the world less lonely for those who live alone.