

How to Talk About Loneliness

There is stigma associated with loneliness. And it is sometimes hard to talk to friends or loved ones about being lonely because you don't know what to say. Here are a few tips to have a meaningful conversation with people in your life who may be lonely.

When someone you care about is feeling lonely it can be challenging to start a conversation about it. Due to the stigma around loneliness, most people don't want to see themselves as lonely, even if that is what they are feeling. Loneliness and social isolation can be a result of many different factors – anything from life circumstances and changes in family dynamics to feelings of inadequacy and lost contacts. Here are few ideas to connect with someone who may be feeling lonely:

- **Start with “me too.”** Often, validating someone's feelings can help them open up and share. We all feel lonely at times; acknowledging that shame and guilt have no place in the conversation can be the first step to creating a new connection.
- **Ask questions that prompt your friend to reflect on their needs.** You can try something like, “What or who are you missing today?” or “What are some experiences, conversations, or people that have felt most meaningful to you in the past?” and listen thoughtfully to their response.
- **Don't dismiss someone's feelings of loneliness.** Even if they seem like the strongest, most extraverted and friendly person you know, they still may feel alone and disconnected. Statements such as “But you have so many friends” or “I wish I was lonely – I am just so busy” may make feelings of self-doubt worse. Instead, ask open-ended questions. “What kinds of experiences make you feel connected to others?” or “What would you like to do together?”
- **Invite them to a get-together with you (even if its virtual) and possibly other friends.** Be understanding and accommodating but firm on your desire to spend time together. Sometimes just the effort speaks volumes!