

Loneliness

The most terrible poverty is the loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.

Mother Teresa

There were times when I had great times with my brothers, pillow fights and things, but I used to always cry from loneliness.

Michael Jackson

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a subjective state made up of feelings, experiences, behaviours and thoughts. It is universal and affects people of all ages and across all cultures. We all suffer from bouts of loneliness now and again. Moving to a new place like university and not knowing anyone can lead to a short period of loneliness which is normal.

Chronic loneliness is not about being alone. Instead it encompasses strong feelings of isolation and thoughts about not fitting in and not being heard and understood by others.

Thy physical effects of loneliness

Studies have shown that chronic loneliness if left untreated can be deadly, as it:

- Weakens the immune system
- Increases blood pressure
- Cardiovascular disease
- Increases weight gain due to a sedentary life style

The emotional and behavioural effects of loneliness

- Feelings of depression and a sense of being lost
- Feeling stuck, helpless and unable to change your situation
- A sense of emptiness
- Being overwhelmed by life and being unable to cope with obstacles
- You no longer feel in control of your life
- Fear of rejection
- Inability to express your anger
- Not feeling that you fit in anywhere
- Withdrawing from others

Treating loneliness

The first step is to acknowledge and recognize that you are lonely and to talk about your feelings.

The next step is to identify whether you use any of the following faulty coping mechanisms:

- You take medication and other substances like alcohol to blunt feelings of loneliness
- You withdraw from social contact with peers, family and colleagues to avoid the feeling of not fitting in
- You hide your true feelings for fear of losing friends
- You engage in activities simply to avoid being on your own e.g. spending hours in the library or sitting in front of your PC
- You immerse yourself in your academic work to stay busy and not have to acknowledge feelings of emptiness
- You absolutely need to be in a relationship and are constantly seeking a new partner

Things to do

Once you have decided to deal with your loneliness there are several things you can do

- Sign up to be a volunteer with an organization which reflects your values. This way you will meet like-minded people, sharing a commonality. Doing meaningful volunteer work will also help to dispel those feelings of emptiness and not having control.
- Join an extra/mural class. Once again you will be surrounded by people who are interested in the same things as you are. This creates a sense of belonging and a feeling that you DO fit in
- Speak to a counselor if you simply do not know how to make new friends. Social skills training can equip you with better ways of approaching people and making small talk
- Identify some of your thinking patterns. If you think in absolute terms you will probably find that most people will not be able to meet your expectations e.g. If people disagree with me, it means that they dislike me. Changing negative thinking patterns will improve how you feel and give you the confidence to approach others
- Basic mistrust. Some of us are scared to make friends as we fear trusting others with our feelings because of hurt and disappointed in the past. The reason for this can be due to childhood experiences and needs to talk through with a psychologist.

Find us @

Student Wellness Services

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Telephone Numbers:

- **021 650 1017**
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Hours:

Mon – Fri 08H30 – 16H30

be informed

know the dangers

make an informed choice!!