



Loneliness

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Winter can be a difficult time, especially when the weather steals our freedom. It isn't easy to travel when the roads are icy, and the temperatures are plummeting. Many people are afraid of falling and are therefore indoors more.

The pandemic that began in 2020 has brought with it a number of restrictions that tend to isolate people. Those who I have found to be most vulnerable are seniors who live in their homes. They don't have the advantage of interacting with others personally and frequently do not have computer skills to reach out. Unlike those who live in a condo, they don't even have opportunity to greet others or wave when going down a hallway or meeting at the mailbox.

I have been thinking about those I care about who are struggling. Even though they have good health and financial security they are desperately lonely. A phone call isn't the same as a hug and having twenty-four hours a day without contact can be very empty.

There are four kinds of loneliness:

1. Isolation – Feeling alone because friends and loved ones are at a distance.
2. Detached – Not having any family, friends or company.
3. Dissociation – Being in a crowd of people but not connecting.
4. Lacking Purpose – Not have anyone to care for or any tasks to perform.

Distance due to contagious illness is usually temporary. Retirement may lead to a period of disillusionment. Death triggers grief. Moving requires adjustment.

Although there are several factors that can contribute to loneliness, psychologists generally agree that loneliness is actually a state of mind. It is difficult to talk someone out of loneliness. That is just theory and will evaporate after the conversation. On the other hand, activity changes the focus and allows the individual to become involved in projects.

I am fortunate that I have always been my own best friend. I keep myself busy with things like cooking, crafts, music and canasta. Learning French keeps my mind sharp and because I am curious, I am able to use the internet to research topics.

Here are some tips to help reduce loneliness:

1. Look for someone who is lonely and interact with them. That way you solve two problems!
2. Watch for individuals who are living alone in their own house and check in with them regularly.
3. Think about your blessings rather than losses.
4. Rejuvenate hobbies that you enjoyed in the past.
5. Say what you want – not what you don't want.
6. Join an internet group of individuals with similar interests.
7. Write out your family history. This will keep you busy and be a treasure for generations to come.
8. Write one letter or phone one person a day who you can encourage.
9. Find a new recipe and make it.

10. Plan an activity that you will do when spring comes.

My uncle, who was a Queen's Bench judge had a sign on his desk that read "I complained when I didn't have shoes. And then I met a man who didn't have feet".

Change your state of mind and change your life!