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# MOTIVATED

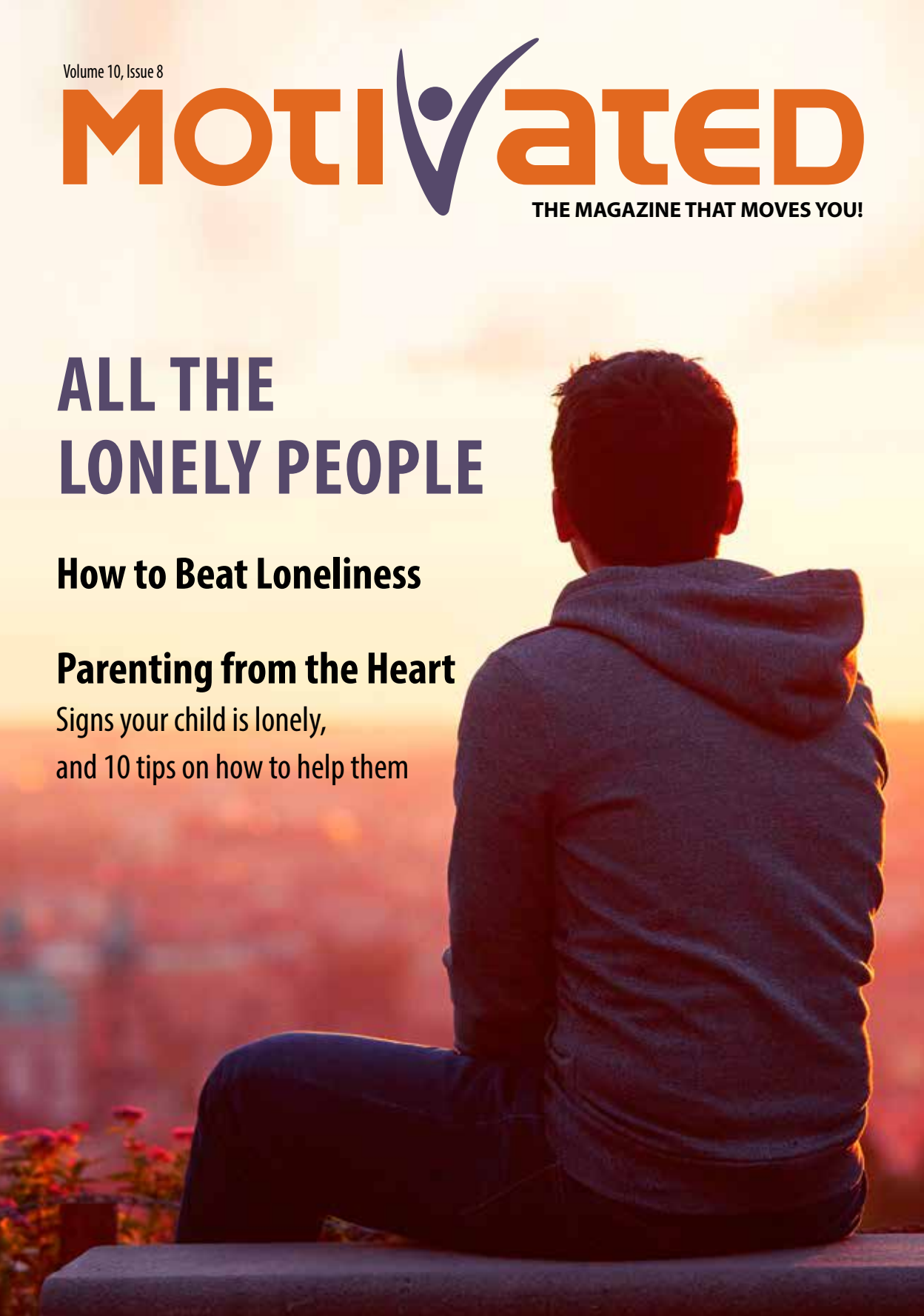
THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

## ALL THE LONELY PEOPLE

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Recently, one of my adult sons, who had lived in Australia for nearly 8 years, called and told me he would be visiting on his way to relocating to Europe. I had not seen him for quite some time, so the prospect of having him here for a while was great.

It turned out he stayed for two months. Since I live alone, it was so nice to have company. Instead of coming home to an empty apartment after work, my son was there. I had someone to cook for at night, opposed to my usual grabbing a quick bite for myself. We talked and watched TV together, and he went with me on the nights I watch two of my grandchildren.

Needless to say, when he left, I felt like I was “empty nesting” all over again, and waves of loneliness swept over me the days after his departure. Even though we are still in constant touch via text and calls, it doesn’t compare to connecting with him in person.

We live in an era in which communication is much simpler than in times past. A co-worker is one email away, a friend is one text away, and a loved one is one video chat away. Although communication may be easier and faster, connecting and staying connected can be quite complicated. Despite all of the advances in social media, our technologically advanced time is also being linked to a loneliness epidemic.

People of all ages battle loneliness—children, youth, adults, and the elderly—and my heart goes out to them. I dedicate this issue of *Motivated* to all those who, like me, feel the pangs of loneliness sometimes. I hope the articles and stories will encourage you to know that people everywhere are looking for someone to connect with, and that it is possible to break free of loneliness.

Christina Lane  
For *Motivated*

# All the Lonely People

By Claire Ronan, adapted

I am a girl, I suppose a woman really now, in my forties with a big family of five children, a loving husband, two wonderful sisters, lots of gorgeous friends and a busy fulfilled life. So how would you ever imagine that I could suffer from loneliness?

But, yes, since my father died six years ago I miss him so much sometimes that I get very lonely. I wonder why, when I am going about my day doing my shopping, going for a walk, putting on my lipstick in the car on the way to work, or typing an email—why does loneliness just hit you?

It could be someone who walks like Dad ahead of me on the street, the tilt of someone's head, watching an old man fumble for his credit card in a supermarket queue the same way Dad did, or a meeting of eyes in a traffic jam with someone dark haired that looks a teeny bit similar.

Loneliness, if it was a color, would have to be a dark grey, slimy color, because that is what it feels like when it

hits me right in the stomach—a horrible gut wrenching feeling. I often wonder when I go about my business how many people are feeling the same, and do they experience the same relief when the feeling lifts?

I always thought loneliness was exclusive to people living alone with no one around, but sometimes loneliness is more acute when I am in a crowded place because no one knows how I feel inside, and it's amazing to see people going about their business not knowing that someone within reach is hurting so much inside.

Be kind to other human beings. No one knows what private turmoil people go through. If you know you can alleviate someone's loneliness, please do so. When we ask someone the rhetorical question, "How are you?" let's stop to actually listen to the answer, because loneliness is a debilitating emotion, which I believe everyone feels at some stage of their lives. ■

# 7 Types of Loneliness, and Why It Matters



By Gretchen Rubin, *The Happiness Project*, adapted

One major challenge within happiness is loneliness. The more I've learned about happiness, the more I've come to believe that loneliness is a common and important obstacle to consider.

To be happy, we need intimate bonds; we need to be able to confide, we need to feel like we belong, we need to be able to get and give support. In fact, strong relationships are key—perhaps *the* key—to a happy life.

Of course, being alone and being lonely aren't the same. Loneliness feels

draining, distracting, and upsetting; desired solitude feels peaceful, creative, and restorative.

It seems to me that there are several types of loneliness. Of course, not everyone experiences loneliness in the situations described—for instance, not everyone wants a romantic partner. But for some people, the lack of certain kinds of relationships brings loneliness.

Once we've pinpointed the particular kind of loneliness we're experiencing, it may be easier to spot ways to address it.

Here are some types I've identified:

**1. New-situation loneliness.** You've moved to a new city where you don't know anyone, or you've started a new job, or you've started at a school full of unfamiliar faces. You're lonely.

**2. I'm-different loneliness.** You're in a place that's not unfamiliar, but you feel different from other people in an important way that makes you feel isolated. Maybe your faith is really important to you, and the people around you don't share that—or vice versa. Maybe everyone loves doing outdoor activities, but you don't—or vice versa. It feels hard to connect with others about the things you find important.

**3. No-sweetheart loneliness.** Even if you have lots of family and friends, you feel lonely because you don't have the intimate attachment of a romantic partner. Or maybe you have a partner, but you don't feel a deep connection to that person.

**4. No-animal loneliness.** Many people have a deep need to connect with animals. If this describes you, you're sustained by these relationships in a way that human relationships don't replace. While I love my pet, Barnaby, I don't feel this myself—but many people feel like something important is missing if they don't have a pet in their lives.

**5. No-time-for-me loneliness.** Sometimes you're surrounded by people who seem friendly enough, but they don't want to make the jump from friendly to friends. Maybe they're too busy with their own lives, or they have lots of friends already, so while you'd like a deeper connection, they don't seem interested. Or maybe your existing friends have entered a new phase that

means they no longer have time for the things you all used to do—everyone has started working very long hours, or has started a family, so that your social scene has changed.

**6. Untrustworthy-friends loneliness.** Sometimes, you get in a situation where you begin to doubt whether your friends are truly well-intentioned, kind, and helpful. You're “friends” with people but don't quite trust them. An important element of friendship is the ability to confide and trust, so if that's missing, you may feel lonely, even if you have fun with your friends.

**7. Quiet-presence loneliness.** Sometimes, you may feel lonely because you miss having someone else's quiet presence. You may have an active social circle at work, or have plenty of friends and family, but you miss having someone to hang out with at home—whether that would mean living with a roommate, a family member, or a life partner. Just someone who's fixing a cup of coffee in the next room, or reading on the sofa.

It's important to realize *why* we feel lonely, because only then can we see how we might address it. If you're *no-time-for-me lonely*, for instance, maybe a solution would be to work with people on a project, where you'd be doing an endeavor together on something you've all made time for. My mother once noted—and I think it's very true—it's easier to make friends when you're working on a project together.

Loneliness is a major factor in unhappiness, so it's an important area to tackle when working on becoming happier. ■

# Time!



## The most important gift for your elderly relatives

By Abigail van Buren, Adapted Reprint

Dear Abby:

This is a message about our senior population. Our children grow up, marry and have children. Each grandchild is special. We love them and adore being with them. Then the grandkids grow up and have little ones of their own. By this time we're old and sometimes need help with housework, yardwork, or just would like to get out of the house to go eat or shop. We still have feelings, and we're not dead. But while it may not be intentional, it seems there is no time for the elderly.

We may say we're fine and don't mind being alone, but it IS lonely at times. No one calls to say hello or ask if we need anything. How long does it take to make a call? It would be nice if each family member called once a week or came by once a month. The love we've always had for family is still there and strong.

Children and grandchildren, please think about this and remember: The most important thing you can give your elderly relatives is your TIME. Time is the most precious gift of all and doesn't cost a thing. Someday you will be old, too!

—Wise Woman in North Carolina

Dear Wise Woman:

I'm printing your letter because it carries a message that some families need to hear. That said, I am a strong advocate for individuals who advocate for themselves. When your children and grandchildren don't call, I'd like to suggest that you can also reach out to them by giving them a call to check in and see how they're doing. And if you are not fine and need help with something, please ASK for it. They are probably happy to help, but might not know you need it.

—Abby ■

### *Editor's Note:*

An additional tip: Create a yearly calendar together with your offspring, with dates marked in when different ones will call or visit.

This was seen posted on the fridge of a 90-year-old man by someone who used to clean his house. His four children called and visited regularly, and all had a copy of the schedule, too.

# Do for One



By Marie Alvero, adapted

Sometimes I feel paralyzed by all the suffering in the world. There's simply no way I could make a dent in all the hunger, sickness, poverty, depression, oppression, loneliness, and death. When you look at the brokenness in its entirety, all you see is desolation.

But I have come to understand how that point of view is actually a tricky way to get myself off the hook, and a very selfish mindset. Someone challenged me to “do for one” what I could not do for many. With that mindset, there's always something I can do.

In the office where I work, I couldn't help but overhear the struggles of a single mom coworker. A big holiday was approaching. She had some funds for gifts coming from grandparents and other sources, but was finding paycheck-to-paycheck living hard with all the extra expenses of the season. My heart broke for her.

That day, I had \$40 in my wallet. I penned a quick note, stuffed it all in an envelope, and gave it to her with a “Happy Holidays.” I did it all very quickly, before I could talk myself out

of it: I didn't want to embarrass her, it seemed a small amount, and maybe someone else needed it more... Excuses, excuses.

When she opened the envelope she teared up. Someone had met her in her struggle, even if just for a moment. I was happy I had stretched myself a little, but mostly, I was impressed at the impact any of us can have on just one person.

- One person you invite for coffee
- One child you commit to sponsor
- One lonely acquaintance you invite over to celebrate
- One toy you give to a charity
- One card you mail to a faraway friend
- One tray of cookies you bake for lonely neighbors
- One family you babysit for
- One elderly couple you do some repairs for
- One sick friend you visit

You have a lot of power and resources to lend for “just one.” Imagine the impact we could have if we each took care of just one person within our reach. ■



# How to Beat Loneliness

By Guy Winch, adapted

**L**oneliness is a subjective feeling. You may be surrounded by other people, friends, family, workmates—yet still feel emotionally or socially disconnected from those around you. Other people are not guaranteed to shield us against the raw emotional pain that loneliness inflicts.

But raw emotional pain is only the beginning of the damage loneliness can cause. It has a huge impact on our physical health as well. Loneliness activates our physical and psychological stress responses and suppresses the function of our immune systems. This puts us at increased risk for developing all kinds of illness and diseases, including cardiovascular disease. Shockingly, the long-term risk chronic loneliness poses to our health and longevity is so severe, it actually increases risk of an early death by 26%.

There are many paths to loneliness. Some enter loneliness gradually. A friend moves away, another has a child, a third works a seventy-hour work week, and before we know it our social circle ceases to exist. Others enter loneliness more suddenly, when they leave for

college or the military, lose a partner to death or divorce, start a new job, or move to a new town or country. And for some, chronic illness, disability, or other limiting conditions have made loneliness a lifelong companion.

Unfortunately, emerging from loneliness is far more challenging than we realize, as the psychological wounds it inflicts create a trap from which it is difficult to break free. Loneliness distorts our perceptions, making us believe the people around us care much less than they actually do, and it makes us view our existing relationships more negatively, such that we see them as less meaningful and important than we would if we were not lonely.

These distorted perceptions have a huge ripple effect, creating self-fulfilling prophecies that ensnare many. Feeling emotionally raw and convinced of our own undesirability and of the diminished caring of others, we hesitate to reach out even as we are likely to respond to overtures from others with hesitance, resentment, skepticism, or desperation, effectively pushing away the very people who could alleviate our condition.



As a result, many lonely people withdraw and isolate themselves to avoid risking further rejection or disappointment. And when they do venture into the world, their hesitance and doubts are likely to create the very reaction they fear—which for them only verifies their fundamental undesirability.

Breaking free of loneliness and healing our psychological wounds is possible, but it involves a decision—a decision to override the gut instinct telling you to stay away and to play it safe by isolating yourself. Instead, you must do three things that require both courage and a leap of faith:

### **Take action**

Accept that loneliness is impacting your perceptions and understand that people are likely to respond more positively than you expect. If you feel socially disconnected, make a list of people you haven't seen or spoken to for a while. You can also join a book, sports or game club, or sign up for a course where you can meet new people. If you feel emotionally disconnected, make a list of five people you've been close to in the past. Reach out to them and suggest getting together and catching up. It will feel scary to do so, and yes, you will worry about it being awkward or uncomfortable. That is why it is also important to:

### **Give the benefit of the doubt**

It is fair to assume that someone who enjoyed your company in the past would likely enjoy spending time with you in the present as well. Yes, they've been out of touch, but you must accept that the reason they've been out of touch lately might have nothing to do with you.

In all likelihood, it is their busy lives, their competing priorities, stresses or opportunities that led to the “disconnect” between you. In other words, the reluctance you assume on their part might not even exist. So reach out to the people on your list but remember to:

### **Approach with positivity**

You may fear rejection, but this is one situation where it is important to fake it. When contacting the people, try to put yourself into a positive mindset. One safe way to do that is by using text or email so you can use emoticons to create the smiley face you might have a hard time manufacturing yourself. Review your messages before you send them to make sure they sound appealing. Avoid accusations (“You haven't called me in months!”), or statements of disconnect (“I know it must be weird to hear from me...”). Express positive sentiment (“Was thinking about you!” or “Miss you!”), an invitation (“Let's grab coffee,” or “I'd love to get dinner and a catch-up,”), and be specific in terms of time frame (“How's next week looking?” or “What's a good day this month?”).

Loneliness is extremely painful, but once you recognize the perceptual distortions it causes, and the psychological trap it creates, you will hopefully be able to marshal your courage, take that leap of faith, and plan your escape. Freedom will be sweet once you do. ■

*If you still struggle, and cannot set yourself to take a positive step, then reach out to your health care provider or a professional therapist. They can support and work with you.*

# Signs your child is lonely, and 10 tips on how to help them

PARENTING  
FROM THE HEART



Adapted Web Reprint

**L**oneliness isn't only felt by older people—around 60% of parents worry their child is lonely too. And research suggests they might be right.

One study of young children found more than one in 10 say they're lonely and unhappy with their social relationships, and other research concluded one in five children aged seven to 12 also feel lonely. In addition, four out of five adolescents report similar feelings, with almost a third describing the experience as 'persistent and painful'.

The charity *Action for Children* has published a report on loneliness in

children, young people and families, and says there are clear links between loneliness in young people and poor mental and physical health, and lower academic attainment.

Sir Tony Hawkhead, chief executive of *Action for Children*, says: "We know how loneliness can impact on lives—from a toddler who seldom meets people because of her mother's anxiety, to young caregivers with no time to make friends with people their own age. There is a role for each and every one of us in addressing loneliness in our communities."

With the help of mental health charity *Young Minds, Action for Children* has come up with some tips for parents to not only spot the signs of loneliness, but to help their kids deal with it, too.

### What to look out for

Even if a child doesn't say they're lonely you may pick up signs, for example if they:

- Always come out of school alone.
- Aren't invited on play dates.
- Don't go out with friends or have them around.
- Seem to have a cloud over their head and sigh a lot.
- Say they feel sad or depressed.
- Spend a lot of time by themselves

or in their room—although, remember some children are content to spend a lot of time alone, while others may be part of a large social circle but still feel lonely.

### What to do if you think your child is lonely

**1.** Talk to your child. Show an interest in their friends and relationships. Talk to them about what healthy friendships are and ask them how they feel about their friendships.

**2.** Organize play dates at home or in a local activity center.

**3.** Show by example. If you were a lonely child, or are a lonely adult, your child might be mirroring this. Make more friends of your own, for example through groups, activities and other parents, and help your child learn how to strike up conversations with new people, maybe by doing this yourself when you're out together.

**4.** Try not to be dismissive or

discouraging when your child wants to fit in with the culture of their peers, as long as this doesn't carry any kind of risk. School culture and being able to fit in is vitally important to children, most acutely in secondary school. It might not be clear what kinds of things are 'in' or 'out'—what computer games/TV programs/music/fashion they know and identify with are inextricably linked to acceptance and friendships. Listen to what they say and be open to what's really important to them.

**5.** See if there are groups or activities in your local area that your child would be interested in. Ask a teacher if you're not sure what activities your child's school offers, and go through the options with your child to see if anything appeals.

**6.** Remember loneliness is a feeling, not a measure of number of friends or time spent interacting socially.

**7.** Support your child in building their resilience, such as celebrating achievements, taking on responsibilities, understanding other people's feelings, and facing fears.

**8.** Speak to a teacher or other member of staff at your child's school—they may be able to help but also look out for signs once they're aware.

**9.** Find ways of increasing communications and confidence with all sorts of people in different ways e.g. texts to friends and relatives; chatting to neighbors; telling jokes; even learning magic tricks.

**10.** Encourage your child to watch out for other children who seem to be lonely e.g. in the playground, and to go and chat to them. ■

# Loneliness

NOTABLE  
QUOTES



Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone and solitude expresses the glory of being alone.—**Paul Tillich**

Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.  
—**Mother Teresa**

Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.—**Maya Angelou**

Negative emotions like loneliness, envy, and guilt have an important role to play in a happy life; they're big, flashing signs that something needs to change.  
—**Gretchen Rubin**

We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community.—**Dorothy Day**

The hardest walk is walking alone, but it's also the walk that makes you the strongest.—**Unknown**

The soul that sees beauty may sometimes walk alone.—**Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe**

A season of loneliness and isolation is when the caterpillar gets its wings. Remember that next time you feel alone.—**Mandy Hale**

Only through our connectedness to others can we really know and enhance the self. And only through working on the self can we begin to enhance our connectedness.—**Harriet Goldhor Lerner**

Many people need desperately to receive this message: 'I feel and think much as you do, care about many of the things you care about, although most people don't care about them. You are not alone.'  
—**Kurt Vonnegut**

