




# Aging Well Together: Understanding and Preventing Loneliness



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August 13th, 2025



# Agenda

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- Welcome and Introduction
- Establishing a Shared Language
- The Story in Numbers
- The Many Faces of Loneliness
- Loneliness in Disguise
- What's Driving Disconnection?
- How Loneliness Shows Up in the Body
- Strategies for Reducing Loneliness

# Welcome

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- Thank you for attending!
- Please introduce yourself
  - Introduce yourself in the chat
  - Provide the story behind your name
  - Share one thing you enjoy doing alone and one thing you enjoy doing with others

# Introduction

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- Assistant Teaching Professor in Sociology
- Affiliate Faculty in Gerontology, Criminal Justice & Social Work
- Teach courses and mentor Honors projects on loneliness
- Student centered, community focused and research attentive
- Community Engaged
- Set the career goal of being an expert on loneliness
- Personal experience with loneliness as a graduate student & even now

# Establishing a Shared Language

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- **Social Isolation** is the objective measure of how many people one actually sees in a certain period of time. Those in isolation are not necessarily lonely.
- **Loneliness** is the mismatch between the number of quality relationships one believes one possesses versus the number of quality relationships one would like to have.
  - Loneliness (or social disconnection) is subjective and dynamic.
  - The absence of loneliness does not equate with feeling socially connected.
  - Loneliness is a continuum or gradient.
  - In a society, there are variations in social and individual thresholds of loneliness.
- **Solitude** is the luxury of feeling socially connected, but self selecting to spend time alone.

# The Story in Numbers

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## Making Caring Common study (2024)

- “In the past 30 days, how often have you felt lonely?”
  - Fifteen percent of adults said “frequently.”
  - Respondents over the age of 65% were much less likely (10%) to report feeling lonely than other groups

## The Cigna Group Study on loneliness (2024)

- About 44% of older adults have experienced loneliness

Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) DSM-V

# The Many Faces of Loneliness

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- Social
- Emotional
- Existential
- Transient
- Situational
- Chronic

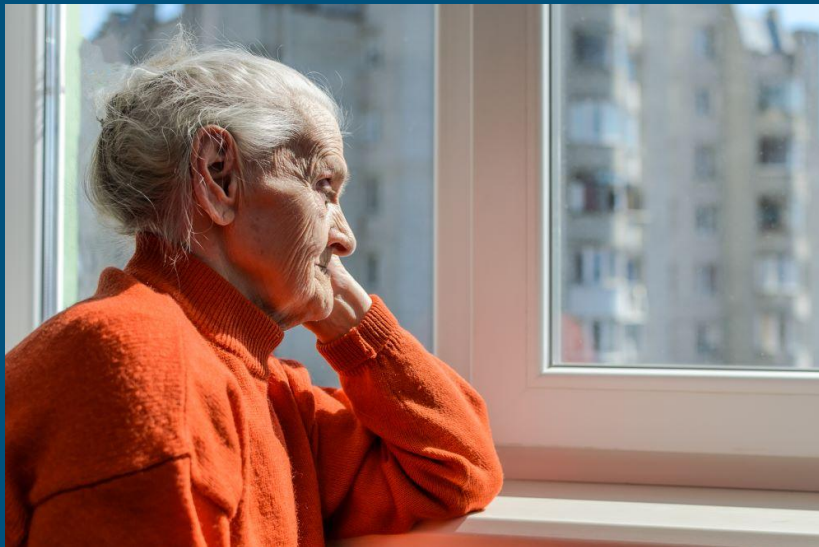


Photo credit:  
British Journal  
of Community  
Nursing

\*\*Thinking back to the “ice breaker” do you engage in those behaviors when you are experiencing any of these types of loneliness?

# Loneliness in Disguise

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- Abnormal anxiety and increase of demanding and/or critical behavior
- Decreased confidence and self esteem
- Disengagement in a variety of contexts (e.g., relationships, hobbies)
- Changes in appetite and
- Difficulting concentrating
- Not attending events one is invited to even though there are no other plans
- Insomnia/sleep disturbances



# What activity is the culprit???

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Photo credit: AARP



Photo credit:  
University of Minnesota

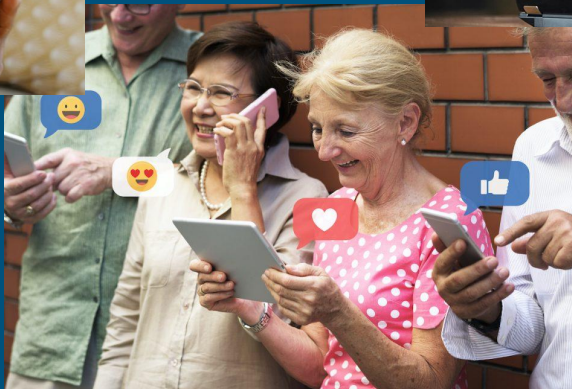


Photo credit: Senior Planet

# What's Driving Disconnection?

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- Unmet essential needs (e.g., food, shelter, safety)
- Mental health challenges
- Lack of strong social connections or support systems
- Experiences of discrimination based on identity or status
- Prolonged technology or digital media usage
- Fewer face-to-face shared experiences and meaningful memories
- Living alone or without companionship
- Reduced participation in civic or community groups
- Declining attendance in religious or spiritual gatherings

# How Loneliness Shows Up in the Body

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- Physical Health Outcomes:
  - Higher likelihood of chronic heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, cancer
  - Sleep disturbances, difficulty self regulating (CNS), weakened immune system
- Mental Health Outcomes:
  - Increased risk of depression and anxiety (#1 symptom), increased risk of suicidality, and self harm, increased likelihood of substance abuse
  - Cognitive decline , increased risk of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia

# Prevention Strategies

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- Creative arts activities
- Intergenerational activities
- Lifelong learning
- Health and wellness activities
- Technology activities
- Community activities
- Volunteer activities



*Photo credit: Sara Maloney.  
Centralina Area Agency on Aging*

# Creative Arts Activities

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## US Men's Shed Movement

- Social engagement allowing for creative activity while fostering friendship development and combating the negative effects of loneliness



Photo credit: US Men's Shed Movement

# Creative Arts Activities

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## Creativity Circle

- Art sessions centered around creative expression, mindfulness, and social and emotional learning

## Project Unlonely Films Season 9

- “Building Connections through the power of Short Films”

# Intergenerational Activities

## Campus Unlonely

- Writing & Connection
- Color & Connection
- Movement & Connection
- Music & Connection
- Storytelling & Connection

## Mon Ami

- Originally an informal connection between Stanford graduate students and older adults, Mon Ami has grown into a case management tool enabling young adults to meet older adults' immediate needs while fostering companionship for both.







# Fostering **compassionate** **leaders**

The GlamourGals program fosters essential leadership skills.

## ORGANIZATION

**Each chapter is led by an all volunteer leadership team** that engages directly with senior centers, recruits new members and schedules activities in their local community.

## COMMUNICATION

From training new volunteers to working with seniors and staff, our GG leaders are **connecting with new people and building up confidence to lead.**

## EMPATHY

**Our teen volunteers trade stories with seniors during visits.**

This helps increase our volunteers' emotional intelligence, and understand the humanity and beauty in others.



# Lifelong Learning

- Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes
- College/University courses
- Online Learning Platforms
- Libraries
- AARP

# Technology Activities

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## Foundation for Art and Healing

- Reflect and Connect Calls
  - Art appreciation events over Zoom

## Technology Manuals (engAGED)

- Virtual programming & Hybrid programming
  - Include considerations, tips and best practices for organizations
- Social Engagement Innovation Hub  
(engAGED)

# Community Activities

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Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation

- Senior Programs and Activities

Plenty of History Buffs

Music Venues or Music Classes

Outside Activities

# Health & Wellness Activities

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- CareMore
  - Togetherness Programs
  - Nifty After Fifty
  - Phone Contacts
- Great Wirral Door Knock  
(What Works Centre for Wellbeing)



Photo credit: Great Wirral Facebook page

# “Service is the antidote to loneliness”

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- Dr. Vivek Murthy, 19th & 21st U.S. Surgeon General

# Volunteer Activities

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Volunteering in person or remotely increases self esteem, self worth, and social confidence.

- In a community
- At a location in need of support
- Through a religious or civic organization



Photo credit: Broadmoor Senior Living

# The Loneliness Calendar

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August: National Friendship Day (1st Sunday in August)

September: Locate an Old Friend Day (9/20/25)

October: World's Teacher Day (10/5/25)

November: National Gratitude Month

December: International Volunteer Day (12/5/25)

January: #NationalNothingDay (1/16/26)

February: National Random Acts of Kindness Day (2/17/26)

March: World Compliment Day (3/1/26)

April: Earth Day (4/22/26)

May: Digital Wellness Day (5/1/26)

June: Intergenerational Day (6/1/26)

July: Social Wellness Month

# “Menu for Connection”

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- Self:

- Make Peace with Yourself, Evaluate Your Routine, Invest in Your Health, Bring a Prop, Get a Pet, Practice Small Kindness, Push Through Rejection, Prepare for Conversation, Travel Wisely

- Family:

- Attend Family Gatherings, Be Less Judgemental, Be Vulnerable, Say Their Name Outloud, Give Yourself a Break, Seek New Family



# “Menu for Connection”

- Friends and Lovers:
  - Curate Your Social Circle, Organize Concrete Plans, Cast a Wider Net
- Community:
  - Develop a Smaller Community, Be a Mentor, Commit to Meaningful Busyness, Go to the Office!, Go to Conferences
- Technology:
  - 7 minute gift, Take Notes on Your Phone, Join podcast/social media communities

Key  
Takeaway:  
You are  
not alone



# Thank you!

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