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Understanding Isolation and Loneliness

Inside this issue:

Insolation and Loneliness	1
Breaking the Cycle	2
Free Local Events	3
Fur-Kid Corner	3
Summer Dessert	4
MEAP Reminder	4

As we've moved into a post pandemic world the amount of reported social isolation and loneliness has continued to increase, despite the increase in travel, social gatherings, and returning to work and school. You may find yourself asking, what's the difference between isolation and loneliness, as they are often referred to as the same, but they're not. However, they can co-occur at the same time and one may cause the other.

Loneliness is defined as a subjective state or feeling. People who report feeling lonely can have positive connections with coworkers, peers and loved ones in their lives, but still feel lonely. There are three subtypes of loneliness:

1. Emotional Loneliness: feeling of the absence of meaningful relationships.
2. Social Loneliness: perceived deficit in the quality of relationships.
3. Existential Loneliness: feeling of fundamental separateness from others and the world.

Social isolation is defined as the lack of social connections and having only a few people to interact with on regular bases. Socially isolated individuals may lack friends or close coworkers, and they often feel lonely or depressed. They can suffer from low self-esteem or anxiety. The following symptoms are often signs of unhealthy social isolation:

1. Avoiding social interactions, including those that were once enjoyable.
2. Canceling plans frequently and feeling relief when plans are canceled.
3. Experiencing anxiety or panic when thinking about social interactions.
4. Feeling distress during periods of solitude.
5. Feeling dread associated with social activities.
6. Spending large amounts of time alone or with extremely limited contact with others.

7. Unemployment: Shame associated with losing a job or being unable to secure new employment can lead individuals to self-isolate.

There are varying life factors that often lead individuals to isolation and loneliness such as:

1. Domestic violence: Avoidances of contact with family, friends, or coworkers because of an unwillingness or fear (danger) to reveal their true situation.
2. Loss of loved ones: Isolating after the loss of friends or family members.
3. Mental health issues: Issues such as anxiety depression, and low self-esteem are often a result of social isolation.
4. Geographic remoteness: Individuals who live in remote areas or who are geographically separated from family and friends due to job duties (military service) can experience feelings of isolation.
5. Physical impairments: Some people with physical disabilities feel ashamed of their disability or appearance, which can make them reluctant to interact socially. Hearing and vision impairments can also create a sense of isolation.
6. Social media: Communication via social media helps some people stay connected to others, but it can lead to isolation if it becomes a substitute for meaningful conversations and in-person socialization.

Now that we understand the differences and some of the driving factors behind isolation and loneliness, we can understand the health implications associated with them. There are many health risk factors associated with loneliness and isolation for those over the age of fifty and in the LGTB community. Recent studies found that:

1. Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes.
2. Social isolation was associated with about a 50% increased risk of dementia.
3. Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) was associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
4. Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.
5. Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.

Next, we must ask ourselves, how do we stop this cycle of isolation and loneliness?



Breaking the Isolation Cycle

It is important for individuals working on social isolation and loneliness to have self-care strategies. This is particularly true when the factors contributing to isolation present real barriers to accessing outside resources.

Individuals can lessen isolation's negative effects by taking steps to address the challenges isolation presents:

1. Engage in relaxing activities.

Exercise and stretching, reading, listening to music, meditation and prayer, journaling, and hobbies can help relieve stress that can be associated with isolation.

2. Follow a routine. Daily routines promote a sense of purpose, normalcy and structure to the day.

3. Maintain healthy habits. Eating well, getting enough sleep, and engaging in physical activity can promote better mental health.

4. Stay connected. If conditions limit in-person contact, phone calls, email, texting, social media platforms, and video conferencing can be used to stay in touch, but be warned....social media

should only be used when no other connections are available. It should under no normal circumstance take the place of in-person connections.

5. Stay informed. Keeping in the loop can be particularly important for those isolated due to a dangerous threat, or geographic isolation. Learning the facts about their risk can help people avoid feeling panicky and or isolated. That said, controlling the amount of media consumption is also helpful, as too much exposure to negative news can feed anxiety and frustration.

Therapy is also another great tool to help those battling isolation. Therapists help by exploring underlying issues related to isolation or self-isolation. For example, a person's isolation may be a sign of depression or an anxiety disorder.

In addition to identifying underlying issues, a therapist can develop a treatment plan that helps people regain a sense of control over their social lives. The types of therapy used to treat social isolation include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and exposure therapy:

1. Cognitive behavioral therapy. CBT is a talk therapy that helps people become more aware of negative or inaccurate thoughts that affect their behavior. CBT sessions can help individuals identify misperceptions and reshape negative thinking.

2. Exposure therapy. Exposure therapy programs help people break avoidance and fear patterns. During exposure therapy sessions, in a safe environment, individuals are exposed (in person or in their imagination) to situations they avoid. They confront fears, process emotions, and manage anxiety.

The last step to breaking the cycle and living a healthier life is following through with self-care. If you or someone you know is struggling with self isolation and or loneliness, please implement some self-care strategies or seek the help and guidance of a therapist.



Free Local Summer Events

As we start to break out of isolation and look for things to do, below are some local free events throughout the summer.

1. South Bend River Lights. You can get a view from the Jefferson and or Colfax bridges.

2. South Bend and Mishawaka's Farmers Markets on the weekends.

3. Concerts at the Potawatomi Park. Attend live music concerts at the Chris Wilson Pavilion.

See their website for further concert dates, times and performers.

4. First Friday's of the month in Downtown South Bend. These Friday's include themed events with activities and music.

5. Friday's by the Fountain. Located at the Jon R. Hunt Plaza, in front of the Morris Center, June through August, enjoy live music and food vendors.

6. Check out the different local parks situated between

South Bend, Mishawaka and Niles, MI. Some parks are nestled along the river and provide the perfect walking path or a place to spread out a blanket and enjoy a picnic or fly a kite.

Listed below are some of the websites you can visit for more information regarding local free and low cost events.

1.<https://www.downtownsouthbend.com/first-fridays>

2.[https://www.visitsouthbend.com/things-to-](https://www.visitsouthbend.com/things-to-do/attractions/free-things-to-do/)

[do/attractions/free-things-to-do/](https://www.visitsouthbend.com/things-to-do/attractions/free-things-to-do/)

3.<https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/local/2023/05/18/festival-guide-2023-local-events-festivals-and-fairs-for-the-family/70042441007/>.

Have a great summer everyone! Be sure to keep your body in motion and enjoy the summer scenery before the cold winter months arrive.

Fur-Kid Corner

As we fast approach the 4th of July Holiday, please remember to secure your furry family members, as they too can become freighted by the fireworks and run off.

Below are some tips to help you if your furry family member gets lost or if you find someone's lost furry loved one.

1. Make a lost or found report with your local city or county animal control. If you lost a furry one, be sure to do a walk through of the shelters as dog/cat breeds can be mislabeled when found. If you live in the city of South Bend,

contact the South Bend Animal Resource Center located at 521 Eclipse Place, (574) 235-9303. If you live in Mishawaka or in county limits, contact the Humane Society of St. Joseph County, located at 2506 Grape Rd., (574) 255-4726. Also, be sure to follow them on Facebook as well, as they post pictures of found dogs/cats.

2. Check and follow your local Facebook groups whom help reunite lost pets with their owners. Local groups such as, South Bend Lost and Found Pets, Elkhart County Lost and Found Pets, Lost and Found Pets of Michiana, and Pet Alert Indiana all have

dedicated members whom help in the reunification of animals.

Also, if you find a furry friend, you can contact local veterinarians offices, as most of them have scanners and will check the animal for a microchip for free. Some local Facebook groups also have microchip scanners and will help with scanning the animal as well.

Always be sure to have updated photos (especially of unique markings) of your furry family member, so you can upload it to your local Facebook group pages and or make and distribute lost or found

fliers.

Also, please be sure to ask for proof of ownership if you find an animal. And, please **DO NOT** post the animal as free on Craigslist, as the animal is lost and should be taken to animal control if you're unable to keep it until reunification.

Remember, don't give up if you lose a furry family member, many animals have been reunited with their families.





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We're on the web!

<https://aarcinfo.org/services/meap>

MEAP



Summer Dessert



Air Fried Peaches

Ingredients

- 1 medium firm peach, halved and pitted
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon light brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon of ground cinnamon
- 2 scoops of vanilla ice cream

Directions

1. Preheat air fryer to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
2. Place peach halves flesh side down in the basket of the air fryer. Cook for 6 minutes.
3. Meanwhile melt butter. Stir in brown sugar and cinnamon until sugar has dissolved.
4. Using tongs, flip peaches over so that they are flesh side up. Brush butter mixture over the top, filling the pit cavity with any excess. Cook for 6 minutes more.
5. Let peaches cool for 5 minutes. Top each half with a scoop of ice cream. Serve immediately.

Nutrition Facts

Calories: 150 Fat: 14g Carbs: 7g Protein: 1g

For more recipe information, please see:

<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/8472779/air-fryer-grilled-peaches-with->

To better serve our employers and their employees and families, Michiana EAP offers both in person and telehealth services, which include scheduling appointments to occur via video using the HIPPA-Compliant Platform, Doxy.

To schedule an initial appointment, simply call our office at 574-287-1879.