

## WORK ON YOUR OWN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Here are tips to help you build the relationships you need.

- **Be strategic.** Think about the types of relationships you want. For example, if you prefer talking with others in small groups, look for opportunities to meet people in smaller groups. If you're looking for support and understanding around something specific, look for related groups or organizations. Use your interests or skills to your advantage: join a sports team, take a course, or join a club to meet people who already share your interests.
- **Take it slow.** Building confidence is an ongoing process. Give yourself manageable challenges. If you feel very isolated, simply learning to feel comfortable in public spaces like a busy coffee shop might be a good first step.
- **Be active—and patient.** It takes time to build relationships. It can be a bit scary at first, but try to initiate conversations or suggest opportunities to spend time with others. Accept that it may take time to feel connected and feel like you're part of the group.
- **Accept that you won't be everyone's friend—and that's okay.** You probably don't get along with everyone you meet (and some people may not get along with you). This isn't a reflection of your value or worth. It just means that you haven't met the right group or individuals yet.
- **Aim for healthy relationships.** If you find that you are the one who isn't heard in your relationships, building assertiveness skills can help you articulate your needs respectfully. The other person is an equal partner and their needs also matter. If you make it all about you and your needs, your relationship may suffer.
- **Identify and work around barriers.** Is there something standing between you and the relationships or activities you'd like to pursue? For example, child care can be a barrier for new parents and transportation or mobility concerns may be a barrier for older adults. If you can't find a solution easily, ask for help. A family member might be willing to help with child care, and a community organization might help with transportation.
- **Build family relationships.** If you have a helpful and supportive relationship with family members, think of ways to increase connections. Geography and other factors might mean that you don't often see each other in person, but phone calls, video calls, email, and other forms of communication can help you stay connected.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Loneliness that persists can be linked to depression, anxiety, and increased risk of other health problems. If feelings of loneliness are affecting your life, consider reaching out to a mental health professional.

You can also contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in hundreds of neighbourhoods across every province, CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive.

Visit the **CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)**.



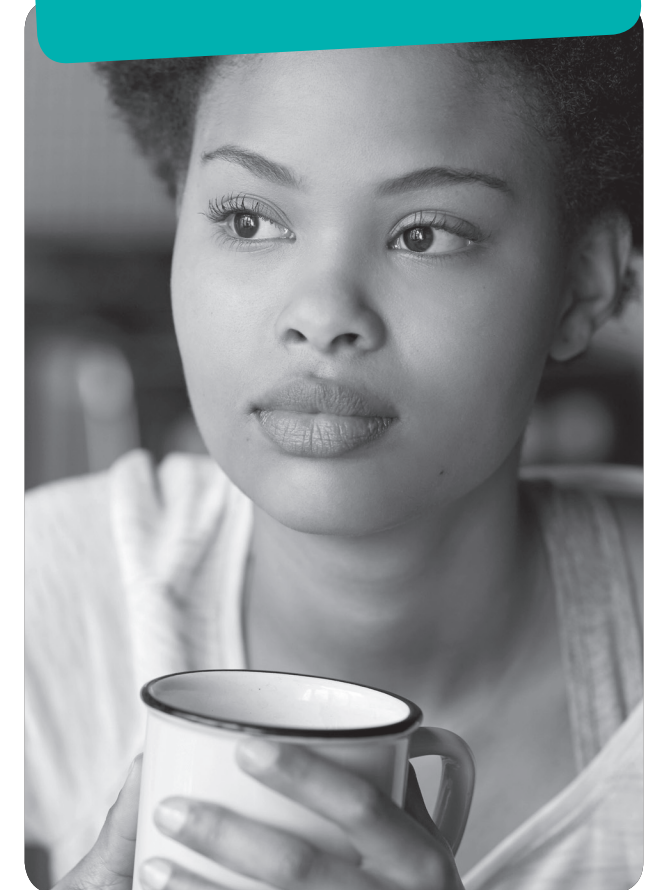
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*Mental health for all*

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## COPING WITH LONELINESS



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Loneliness is an experience that means our current close relationships don't meet our needs. Despite the name, you don't always have to be alone to feel lonely. Loneliness can come up whenever we feel alone, unwanted, or isolated. Loneliness can come up when:

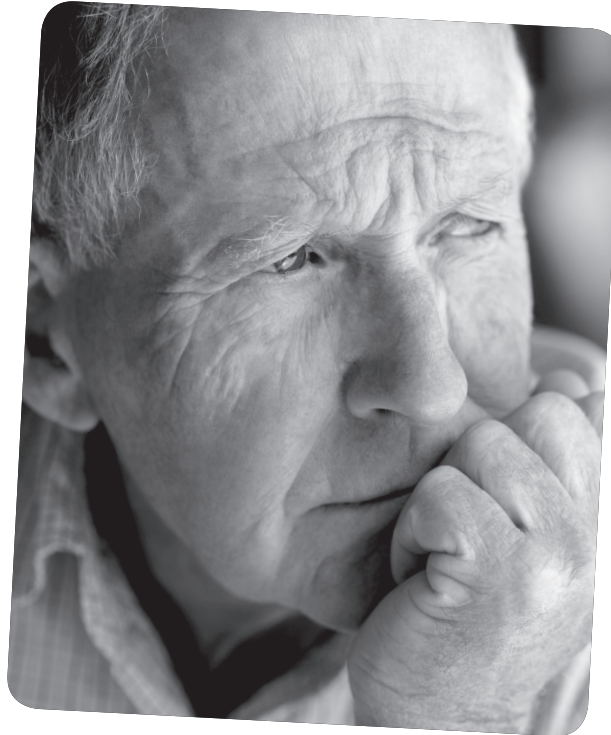
- We're around a lot of people but feel like we don't quite fit in
- We're around a lot of people but don't receive the support or connection we're looking for
- We lose an important person in our life, like a partner, family member, or close friend
- We're alone and want to be with others

Some kind of social support is important to well-being. There is no right or wrong social network—people feel satisfied with different types of social circles, friends, and relationships. What matters is how you feel. If you feel supported and understood, your relationships are likely in good shape. If you feel lonely, you may be missing important pieces in your relationships.

If you do feel lonely from a lack of friends, you aren't alone. Around 1 in 4 Canadians say they aren't satisfied with the number of friends they have.

## HOW CAN I COPE WITH LONELINESS?

Loneliness can create more loneliness. For example, loneliness can make you feel like you don't fit in, which only makes it harder to reach out. This might seem to confirm that you really don't fit in, which can make you feel even lonelier. Loneliness can be difficult, but it's still just a feeling. It can be changed. When you challenge feelings of loneliness or start to make changes in your life, the cycle of "loneliness thinking" starts to break down.



### Ask yourself why you feel lonely

Do you feel lonely because you don't have others around you? Do you isolate yourself from others? Do you feel lonely even when you're with others? Understanding your situation can help you take action where it matters most. This isn't always easy, so consider talking with a counsellor if you need help.

### Avoid comparing yourself to others

It's easy to look at other people and feel left out, but appearances can be deceiving. People want others to see their best side, but don't be fooled by the message others show the outside world. Social media in particular can make people feel like everyone but them is surrounded by friends, but social media is only a controlled snapshot. Remember that you can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. Feeling like you aren't as good as others is just that—a feeling, not the truth.

### Give yourself some time, especially during big changes

It's common to feel lonely during transitions like starting at a new school, moving to a new city, or starting or leaving a job. Whenever you're going through a transition, it can take some time to settle in and find your new place. Loneliness may only be a temporary stop along the way.

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### Think about what else is going on

How you're feeling in other parts of your life may add to feelings of loneliness. For example, mental health problems like depression or social anxiety can bring up a lot of difficult thoughts that make it easier to avoid social situations. Some other health problems can make connecting with others harder and leave people feeling isolated. In some situations, managing challenges in other parts of your life can reduce some feelings of loneliness.

### Find a way to take advantage of time you'll be alone

Time alone may be an opportunity to pursue a hobby, learn a new skill, get into a good book, listen to music, or connect with nature. If being alone is a time when unhelpful thinking takes over, consider talking with a mental health professional.