



Peer Support Team Newsletter

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Peer Support Teams are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Serve - Protect - Support - Surpass

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Loneliness: A New Epidemic?

Loneliness isn't just a social problem – it's a physical problem as well, as scientific research over the past decade has revealed in spades. Research into the topic has found links between social isolation and a variety of physical and mental health conditions. Knowing this, some social critics are asking a once-unthinkable question: should social contact be treated as a basic need on par with food, water, sleep and shelter?

Research suggests that the answer is yes, in part because we now have a better understanding of how the human body responds to loneliness – and, in contrast, adversely reacts to a lack of social connection. According to a new study published by scientists in *Psychological Science*, the flagship journal of the Association for Psychological Science, the same part of the brain that is triggered when a person is hungry is activated when a person is lonely (<https://www.salon.com>).

Loneliness and Social Isolation: Not the Same

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact. Social isolation is a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated.

Although it's hard to measure social isolation and loneliness precisely, there is strong evidence that many adults aged 50 and older are socially isolated or lonely in ways that put their health at risk. Recent studies found that:

- Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- Social isolation was associated with about a 50% increased risk of dementia.
- 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.
- Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- 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 (www.cdc.gov).

If you're feeling lonely or socially isolated, try reaching out. Contact friends, coworkers, family members, and others with whom you might like to spend some time. Such reach outs may not be perfect or produce desired results, but they are a good place to start. If initial contacts are unsuccessful, try again. It's likely that your efforts will eventually be rewarded...JAD

Reaching out to others to decrease feelings of loneliness is part of a "Life-by-Design"

Life-by-Default vs Life-by-Design

Consider *life-by-default* and *life-by-design*. These perspectives are conceptual constructs and describe a continuum along which a person can engage life. It is unlikely that anyone lives life totally by default or by design. Most people live sometimes or most times by default, and sometimes or most times by design. Life-by-default differs from life-by-design in that life-by-default is what you get if you do not practice life-by-design.

Not much thought or effort goes into life-by-default. Persons who are oriented toward life-by-default often feel powerless. They subscribe to the “This is my life. What can I do about it? It is what it is. What will be, will be” life position. This is very different from the life-by-design philosophy of “taking life by the horns.” Life-by-default does not mean that life experiences are or will be undesirable. Quite the contrary, life experiences can default to very desirable circumstances. It is a matter of probability. The probability that life will default to something great and wonderful is less than the probability of desirable outcomes in life-by-design.

Life-by-design is best described by a single word: *intention*. Persons oriented toward life-by-design act intentionally and accept responsibility for their decisions and behaviors. Life-by-design persons are not passive observers of life. They do not wait for life to simply unfold. They feel empowered and they act in ways to direct their lives. In life-by-design there is no illusion that all things can be directed, controlled, or even influenced. Instead, there is respect for what might be changed and what must be accepted. There is recognition of the influence of personal values, societal values, and cultural influences.

Life-by-design persons do not blindly accept the values of their childhood. They consider all values and evaluate them from their now-adult perspective. They adopt those that are appropriate for them, and live accordingly.

Life-by-design is thoughtful, mindful. To engage life-by-design, persons must accept reasonable risk, endorse the idea that they can decide many things for themselves and use this knowledge to make a difference in their lives. Making an effort to accomplish this is the first step toward moving from a life-by-default to a life-by-design and a functional life perspective (JAD).

Relationships: Feeling Overwhelmed During an Argument

Feeling “Flooded”

When you find yourself feeling overwhelmed during an argument, you’re probably feeling flooded. Flooding is a sensation of feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed during conflict, making it impossible to have a productive conversation.

Flooding has a number of indicators:

- Your voice raises.
- You interrupt or talk over your partner.
- You often say things you don’t really mean.
- You feel out of breath.
- You experience a flight-or-fight response.
- Your heart races and you may feel like you are having a panic attack.
- You shut down during conflict.

If you’re feeling flooded, communicate this to your partner and take a break from the conflict. Come to an agreement with each other that if one of you needs a break, the other partner will respect it. Then, practice doing an activity that calms you for at least twenty minutes. This could be something like reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music.

When you're ready to rejoin the conversation, communicate this to your partner so you can start again on a calmer footing.

The Gottman Institute, www.gottman.com

On the Science Scene

The speed of light and a straw in a glass of water.

Light travels at about 186,000 miles/second in a vacuum. A straw in a glass of water seems to be bent or broken because water is denser than air and so light travels slower in water than in air. The change in speed bends the light as it passes from one substance to the other, a phenomenon called *refraction*.



Our brain cannot compensate for this change of light-speed and we see the straw as bent or broken and slightly magnified.