

LONELINESS:

Find a different way with it

Relationship expert Jan Day explains how to feel more connection with yourself and others

It's funny how people mix up loneliness and aloneness.

For me, loneliness means that we are unhappy to be on our own and that we're yearning for more connections, while aloneness refers to times when we are content to be on our own. Of course, we can be both in our lives.

Loneliness means we feel disconnected from others, but even more importantly, we are disconnected from ourselves. Connection is fundamental to our sense of wellbeing so when we are feeling lonely, we need to rediscover our relationship with ourselves and others. When we're feeling this way, we often focus on what is missing – we are bored with ourselves and not really present in the moment. In this state, we generally want to get something from outside ourselves to fill our minds up. Often we'll have habitual ways of exiting from our own life (through social media, for example, TV, over-sleeping or working too much).

Aloneness is very different – in this state we are happy and interested and connected to ourselves, enjoying the sense of our own company and fascinated by our own presence in our body, thoughts and feelings. Here we feel a contented sense of solitude rather than a needy sense of loneliness.

Rather than focusing on how to not feel lonely, we need to put our attention on what we actually do want, which is connection with ourselves, with others and with the world.

CONNECTION WITH OURSELVES

Connecting with ourselves is probably less scary than doing so with others, so it's a good place to start and it's also a good foundation for forming connections with others later.

Practice awareness

Begin by breathing as if you could breathe all the way down into your feet. Bring your attention to the sensations down here. Get very interested in what is there. Normally you don't even notice this area of your body unless there is pain, but now you're going to be curious and investigate. Notice that as you bring awareness to your feet, your legs start to light up with sensations and a sense of aliveness. Do the same with your hands and arms. Linger there – enjoy the life energy that is in your limbs when you listen. And then notice that as you bring

attention to your legs and arms, you may notice sensations in your chest as feelings arise in your heart. Be as curious, warm and accepting as you can to whatever is happening now inside your body. Your aim is to stay connected with yourself through whatever else you explore.

Get interested in your own impulses

Once you have some sense of connection with yourself, notice if you are looking after yourself well. How do you nourish yourself with stimulation? Do you enjoy art, reading, writing, sport, crafting or other hobbies? Make a list of things you enjoy doing. To begin with don't censor it at all and don't judge if you are good at it or not. Just make a list. Be curious about what you like doing or want to do. Once you have the list, begin to look for opportunities to get involved in some of the activities you've highlighted. Look out for clubs or classes where others are interested in similar things. When you are there, immerse yourself in enjoying what you are doing and be interested in who is around you. As you become more interested and engaged with the things you enjoy doing, you'll naturally find it easier to connect with other people because you will already feel more full and connected with yourself.

Don't forget self-care

Often we become lonely after a break up with a partner. The grief of loss can overwhelm us and we forget to look after ourselves. This is a time when self-care is very important. Start treating yourself as if you are in love with yourself. When you look in the mirror smile at the one you see and notice what is lovely about her. Cooking or preparing food is something that is often associated with



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WHO IS AROUND YOU?

Once you have a sense of love for yourself, begin to be curious and interested in who and what is around you. Stay connected to yourself while you notice who is there. Remember you are already full and whole – and you have lots to offer to the world. When you are in contact with other people, put your focus on discovering who they are, listening and being fascinated by them just as you did for yourself. This can be a great time to involve yourself in voluntary work activities in order to give some of what you have within you and meet others at the same time.

It can be challenging to turn loneliness around and so motivating yourself is vital. Here are a few steps you can take to move forward.

Create a vision board of the life you’d love to live

To do this simply gather a pile of pictures from magazines or books that represent what you’d like to create in your life. Choose those that represent the gathering of friends, close friendships, an intimate partner, community and closeness to family. When you have enough, arrange and glue them onto a large sheet of card. It’s a good idea to include a picture of yourself so that you can make sure that you are creating a vision that you will want once you are living it. Put it up somewhere that you’ll see every day. It will give you a continual message of where you are going and inspire you to take the small steps to get there.

Create a list of values for your relationships

Do one for your relationship with yourself, because that always comes first, and then do another for relationships with others. To make the list, take time over a few days to brainstorm what you think is important and what you value. Once you have about 20 qualities or attributes, put them into priority order. This exercise gives you clarity about what is important to you and will help you to search out and find people who are compatible with you.

Keep a journal

Try to be interested in as much as possible and allow gratitude to arise for what you have in your life, what you do like to do and what you are interested in. This will reinforce your understanding that you are enough so that times of being on your own can be enjoyed and used to nourish you.

Loneliness can be a gift in that you can learn what it is that you really want from life. When you do find those connections that make you feel alive and fulfilled, then you will also find yourself being free to relish aloneness in all the richness that chosen solitude can bring.

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an act of love for another. It can also be a wonderful act of self-love as well as very therapeutic. Think about what you enjoy eating and also what is healthy – this isn’t the moment to splurge on ice-cream. Make sure you have the ingredients available so that when you come in from work, you can tune in to what you would like to eat and then make it for yourself.

As you begin to treat yourself with love and stay present and connected to yourself, you’ll discover that even when you are on your own, you can enjoy aloneness. And when you are radiating self-love and engaging with things you enjoy doing, you’ll discover that connections happen more naturally without you even thinking about it.