

# Understanding Loneliness

Nearly 58% of Americans are considered lonely. Even in a time when we are more connected than ever, many struggle with crowded loneliness and are more alone than ever. Loneliness is associated with several adverse physical and mental health outcomes or can directly result from a physical or mental health condition. Explorers often seek connections because they feel lonely but desire a relationship with God and others.

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# What is Loneliness?

Loneliness is the emotional or physical response to feelings of isolation. Loneliness is more than just simply being alone. Because God created humans for connection, relationship, and belonging, loneliness can feel like:

- unmet needs of social engagement
- inability to connect with others on an intimate or deeper level
- overwhelming feelings of being lonely
- no close or best friends
- low or negative feelings of self-worth and belonging
- social exhaustion or burnout
- feeling like no one wants to hang out with you
- thoughts that you are unimportant
- feeling there's no place you belong

# Wise Connections

The Explorer has taken a vulnerable step by reaching out to a stranger for help and has expressed a need they are feeling around loneliness. Before you respond, pray for them. As a Responder, you represent the family of God in Christ. And like Christ, you are to love them in their loneliness and help point the way to a relational connection with God.

Resist the urge to fix their problem or use God as a solution, but guide them into a trusting relationship by being their friend. Much of the first part of the conversation will be asking questions and empathizing with the Explorer. As trust builds, guide them in exploring the causes of their loneliness. As you learn more through your relationship with them, you may need to refer them to professional help or other ministries that can guide a deeper assessment of their needs.

# Tips for Responding to Explorers Experiencing Loneliness

1. **Be empathetic** but avoid phrases like *"I know exactly how you feel"* or *"we all get lonely sometimes."* Explorers experiencing loneliness just want to be heard, and statements like this make the conversation about you.
2. **Affirm and validate** the feelings of the Explorer. Let them know that you are here to listen. They do not have to bear this burden alone.
3. **Emphasize how glad you are** that they had the courage to reach out.
4. **Do not push Scripture** or programs without first building rapport (relationship) with the Explorer.
5. **Avoid language that feels judgmental or accusatory.** Instead of saying *"when you feel lonely"* or *"when you can't make friends,"* say *"when a person feels lonely"* or *"when a person struggles to make friends."*
6. **Do not diagnose** or try to fix the problem for them but try to understand their situation.
7. **Don't overthink your response.** Simple is better. Asking questions shows you care and ensures you are building on the right information and not just making assumptions. *"Can you tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_?"* Or *"It sounds like you've struggled with loneliness for a while; how has it impacted you?"*

# A Great Sample Response

Let's put into practice those tips to respond. Here's a great example of a healthy response for an explorer experiencing loneliness!

**EM** = Explorer Message      **IR** = Initial Response      **FR** = Follow-up Response

**EM** Even though I am surrounded by people all the time and see people at work, I feel so alone. It's like no one even notices me or wants to know me.

**IR** Hi Ryan, this is Doug. I received your message about being surrounded by people but feeling alone. I'm so glad you reached out. That took courage to contact a stranger, share your struggle, and ask for help. I am really proud of you for doing that.

**EM** Thanks, but it was nothing. I am getting so desperate that I almost had no choice but to reach out for help.

**IR** Well, I want you to know you aren't walking thru this struggle alone. I am here to help. It can be hard to be in a room full of others but still feel alone. I would love to talk more about it and offer support, whatever that might look like. If you are comfortable, can I give you a call tonight or tomorrow morning?

**FR** Hi Ryan, this is Doug. I wanted to follow up with you today. It took a lot of courage to reach out. It can be uncomfortable talking to a stranger, but I'd love the chance to connect with you. There is no pressure, but I want to let you know I am here for you.

**OBSERVE** - The example response here is empathetic and validates the explorer's action to call and feelings. Simply engaging or offering to engage with people is an essential step to building rapport and letting them know you are a safe person to reach out to and ask for help.



[Learn More](#) about starting a Mental Health Ministry in your church.

[Learn More](#) about becoming a Mental Health First Responder Coach.