Loneliness Epidemic

SEPTEMBER IS SUICIDE
PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

Americans are in the middle of an epidemic! I'm not talking about the current COVID19 Pandemic, but an epidemic of loneliness. A recent Cigna survey showed that almost half of Americans reported that they: always or sometimes feel alone (46%) or left out (47%) and 54% said they always or sometimes feel that no one knows them well. In fact, in the last 50 years, rates of loneliness has doubled in the United States.

Why is this? Some researchers say that this is due to the ever increasing pace and complexity of life, the do more with less mentality, where personal relationships suffer in the end. Some say it is due to the digital revolution where face-to-face encounters have been replaced with video chat, texts, or email. I would argue that it is probably a combination of both occurrences simultaneously.

What is the effect? A 2010 study by Brigham Young University found that loneliness shortens a person's life by 15 years, about the same impact as obesity or smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Also, lonelier individuals are less likely to achieve quality sleep, experience reductions in reasoning and creativity, and report less job satisfaction. Loneliness is not only correlated with mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and suicidality, but can greatly reduce workplace productivity!

How can we change this?
1. **Put down the screens.** Give yourself a break from your phone, computer, and television. Try to commit to at least an hour per day, more if you're able and dedicate this time to rekindling relationships with family, friends, and/or coworkers. Face-to-face interactions builds stronger connections, leads to increased trust, and helps us better cope with stress.
2. **Slow down.** Take a break every couple hours while at work and don't eat your lunch at your desk. Leave the building if you're able and allow your mind and body the opportunity to relax. Research shows that this practice will likely increase your production at work in addition to help you manage problems.
3. **Take time to get to know your people.** This is more than just small talk around the water cooler. Getting to know your coworkers often leads to improved morale, greater level of awareness, and more productive and efficient teams. Getting to know your coworkers also generates a safe and supportive environment that encourages creativity and innovation.

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