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AVOIDING LONELINESS



"It is no new thing to be lonely. It comes to all of us sooner or later. If we face it, if we remember that there are a million others like us, if we try to reach out to comfort them and not ourselves, we find in the end we are no longer lonely. We are in a new family, the family of man." Morris L. West.

The holidays are over. It's cold, it's dark and it's lonely. Loneliness does not necessarily affect people who are alone, but it



affects people who believe they have no close relationships. You can be lonely in a crowded room or on a base that is bustling with activity. Being alone can be productive.

Alone time can give a person a chance to get away from distractions and concentrate on important matters. Being lonely is rarely productive and the condition of loneliness often distracts the lonely person to the point where they become unproductive.

Loneliness comes from feelings of rejection, shyness, misunderstanding, illness and inadequacy. Poor social skills and negative attitudes add to the lonely feelings.

Loneliness can lead to stress and anxiety that increase feelings of rejection and inadequacy and often lead to physical illnesses. This stress and anxiety often keeps people from seeking ways to improve social skills and the cycle of loneliness continues.

Loneliness is not "wrong". There is nothing wrong with lonely people. One problem with lonely people is that they think their problem is unique and nobody else feels the way they do. When you think that you are the only one who feels this way, your loneliness increases. Thinking that loneliness is "wrong" or that it is "not supposed to happen" increases stress, anxiety and negative attitudes.

This attitude causes isolation and the lack of desire to seek ways to improve social skills. Once again the cycle of loneliness continues.

It doesn't have to be that way. The first thing to do to eliminate loneliness is to admit it and accept that you are lonely. This is your feeling. It is not caused by anyone else or by any circumstances. You own it. Since you own it, you have the power to change it.

Steps to building relationships and beating loneliness:

Maintain your long distance relationships by:

- Getting on an economical long distance calling plan. Call each other on birthdays, special occasions and "just because".
- Use email messages and electronic greeting cards to stay in touch. Many e-greeting cards are free. Visit whenever financially feasible.
- When visiting be sure to spend a significant amount of time "getting to know" the other person. Get caught up on personal issues and events that have happened during the separation.

Develop new relationships by:

- Joining a club or group in which you will share an interest with others
- Asking to join someone sitting alone and introduce yourself.
- Look for the similarities between you and other people, rather than focusing on differences.

Engage in fun, social activities, particularly physical activities such as basketball or bowling.

Think positively. Recognize that you can change only yourself, not others.

Look at loneliness as an opportunity to strengthen old relationship and forge new relationships. People with strong friendships are less vulnerable to physical and mental distress. Friendships are rewarding and well worth the effort to obtain and maintain.