- Loneliness

MiNDFOOD REPORT

THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

Physically and emotionally, humans thrive when we spend quality time with friends and family and enjoy meaningful interaction and deep connections with one other. Yet technology, a winner-takes-all economy and fragile social and family ties are all driving an epidemic of loneliness, leaving millions around the world feeling vulnerable, sad and alone. So how did we get here as a society? What are the signs that you or a loved one are at risk of the debilitating physical and mental effects of loneliness? And what can we do as individuals and as a community to feel less alone and more connected with one another? In this special report we look at the trends, examine the latest studies, talk to the experts and learn what we must do to come together again.

WORDS BY DONNA DUGGAN

Whether it's a smile from a stranger, a hug from a friend or a conversation where you have felt understood and heard, humans thrive – mentally, physical and emotionally – when we feel connected to one another.

Physically and emotionally, connection causes a response involving the release of hormones like oxytocin and serotonin, leading to feelings of calm, trust and wellbeing. This can then lead to muscle relaxation and a slower heart rate, boosting health. Mentally, brain scanning studies show that when we spend quality time with another person, we experience intrinsic joy and that the brain regions which play an important role in motivation are activated. Conversely, when we feel lonely and rejected, brain regions associated with distress and rumination are activated instead. That means that when we feel connected to people and the world around us we feel more positive, supported and motivated to achieve goals, and when we feel disconnected we can feel trapped in a cycle of feeling low.

Our human need for connection started in ancient times when our ancestors learnt that we could protect and feed ourselves better if we co-operated, explains Jeremy Lent in his book, *The Web of Meaning*. Lent believes connectedness is what is needed to lead humanity to a sustainable, flourishing future. "Competitiveness and selfishness," says Lent, "have lain too long at the root of our thinking." He says "an ecological civilisation will only emerge when the symbiotic linkages between people become a more powerful force than the competitive impulses engendered by the dominant culture".

In today's world it can seem like everyone is only out for themselves. In the US particularly, all you hear in politics is 'us and them', the 'good and the bad', the 'right and the wrong'. Even on a personal level, whether it is finding your place at school, connecting with colleagues at work, developing new friendships or just feeling out of place in your own family, we all, at various stages in our lives, find ourselves questioning our place in the world and our connection with the people around us.

However, humans aren't built for this disconnection and separation, and the rising epidemic of loneliness shows the catastrophic consequence. A sense of belonging, of being understood and accepted for who we are, is vital for our health and survival.

US Surgeon General Dr Vivek Murthy placed a global spotlight on loneliness when he declared the issue an epidemic in 2023. Dr Murthy's explanation for the epidemic status was that loneliness is far more than "just a bad feeling" and represents a major public health risk for both individuals and society. Dr Murthy also pointed out that, although many people grew lonelier during COVID-19, nearly half of adults reported feeling lonely even before the outbreak.

In 2018, the British Government appointed a Minister for Loneliness as the result of a year-long investigation into the prevalence of loneliness in the UK. According to the report, 9 million Britons suffer from loneliness – 14% of the population. Among the more vulnerable, such as the elderly and those living with disabilities, the rates are much higher. They launched the nationwide 'Campaign to End Loneliness', which targeted older people. It introduced campaigns to raise awareness of the issue, as well as promotion of behavioural change, education, collaborations and a range of supportive activities. Perhaps showing the complex and challenging nature of the issue, a study published in 2024 in *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* showed that there was no evidence that the anti-loneliness campaign led to a significant decrease in loneliness or mental health, and there was little change in social participation among older people exposed to the campaign, encouraging the UK government come up with new strategies.

Closer to home, the latest statistics from the Australian Government show that just over 1 in 6 (16%) Australians experience loneliness, with an increasing number of people aged 15-24 experiencing loneliness. The most recent official loneliness survey of the New Zealand population found that 3.4% of the population aged 15+ felt lonely most/all of the time in the last four weeks, and another 13% felt lonely some of the time.

MORE THAN JUST A BAD FEELING

Loneliness is defined as the perceived sense of isolation causing a subjective distressing experience. Subtypes include social loneliness, referring to having too few people in one's social network, and emotional loneliness, referring to having a lack of

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"LONELINESS IS THE GREAT MASQUERADER. IT CAN APPEAR AS ANGER, ALIENATION, SADNESS, AND A HOST OF DISTRESSING EMOTIONAL STATES."
DR VIVEK MURTHY

intimacy and attachment in relationships. "What does it feel like to be lonely?" Olivia Laing writes in her book, *The Lonely City*. "It feels like being hungry: like being hungry when everyone around you is readying for a feast. It feels shameful and alarming, and over time these feelings radiate outwards, making the lonely person increasingly isolated, increasingly estranged."

In her podcast on 'Shame and Accountability', research professor and author Dr Brené Brown highlights the connection between shame and loneliness. Dr Brown says shame is the fear of disconnection. "We're physically, emotionally, cognitively, and for many of us, spiritually, hard-wired for connection, love, and belonging, and it's why we're here, it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. Think about how powerful shame is, because it's the fear of disconnection, it's the fear that we've done something or failed to do something. We haven't lived up to an ideal, or we haven't accomplished a goal that makes us worthy of connection."

FEELING UNDERAPPRECIATED

The 'Making Caring Common' report by the Harvard Graduate School of Education is a deep dive into loneliness. The report highlights how social isolation is not the same as loneliness. People can be surrounded by others and still feel deeply lonely. The lack of quality relationships is just as big a problem as the lack of quantity. For example, one person in the survey who experienced loneliness described having plenty of family members around but not feeling appreciated by them. Another person said they were "surrounded" by other people "who only are present in my life because [I] am useful" to them. Another person said, "In a room full of people, I often feel judged or not seen by others, which makes me feel as though I do not belong." In their findings, the researchers also note what they describe as "existential loneliness" or a "fundamental sense of disconnection from others or the world".

Of those who were lonely, for example, 65% said they felt "fundamentally separate or disconnected from others or the world" and 57% said they "were unable to share their true selves with others".

Feelings of loneliness often come and go throughout life, and can fluctuate depending on circumstances and life events. However, in some cases, loneliness can become chronic, persisting for extended periods of time. Globally, renowned mental health research institute the Black Dog Institute reports that loneliness is common, affecting around 1 in 3 adults: "For some it may be temporary, and for others it may be more long term. The subjective nature of loneliness means that people can live relatively solitary lives and not feel lonely while others may lead a seemingly rich social life and feel quite the opposite. Loneliness is not a sign of vulnerability, fragility, or weakness, nor does it occur only in people who are physically isolated or who are elderly."

Some people may not even realise their low mood stems from loneliness. "Loneliness is the great masquerader," Dr Murthy writes in his book, *Together*. "It can appear as anger, alienation, sadness, and a host of distressing emotional states."

Dr Murthy also believes that it often manifest through behaviours such as drug or alcohol abuse. In other words, we might feel awful without knowing loneliness hides beneath our pain.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

According to the Harvard researchers, the leading causes of loneliness according to all who were surveyed included: technology (73%), insufficient time with family (66%), overwork/fatigue/being too busy (62%), mental health challenges (60%) and living in a society that is too individualistic (58%). No religious or spiritual life, too much focus on one's own feelings, and the changing nature of work were also perceived causes of loneliness selected by around 50% of people who participated in the survey.

Interestingly, research shows that technology can both increase and decrease loneliness, depending on how it's used. Technology and loneliness are interlinked, researchers have found, by the ways we interact with social media, emails and text messaging and binge-watching. If you constantly try to keep up with the endless barrage of emails, text messages, social media feeds and 24-hours news cycle or if

LONELINESS THROUGH THE AGES

International research involving over 128,000 participants from more than 20 countries published by Northwestern University shows loneliness in adulthood follows a U-shaped pattern: it's higher in younger and older adulthood, and lowest during middle adulthood. The study also identified several risk factors for heightened loneliness across the whole lifespan, including social isolation, education and physical impairment. The study replicated this U-shaped pattern across data from studies in the UK, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, Israel and more.

Although loneliness affects everyone in the community, studies have noted that young adults (18-29) are the most vulnerable. This can be considered counterintuitive, as adolescents and young adults are often assumed to be embedded within well-established social structures. However, adolescence and young adulthood are also associated with significant social changes; from fitting into social groups and leaving school or home, to completing higher education or finding work.

Older people are also especially vulnerable to loneliness, especially those over the age of 75; general poor health and disability can increase the risk of experiencing loneliness. According to Age UK, more than 2 million people in England over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million older people say they go over a month without meaningful interaction. Socially isolation occurs for reasons such as no longer being the hub of the family, retirement, the deaths of spouses and friends, or through disability or illness.

Younger single people whose friends are getting married and having children may experience feelings of loneliness. It can also be isolating if you feel a lack of direction when people around you are forging ahead in their lives. During midlife people may experience loneliness due to hormonal changes, the transition of children leaving home, and life changes such as divorce.

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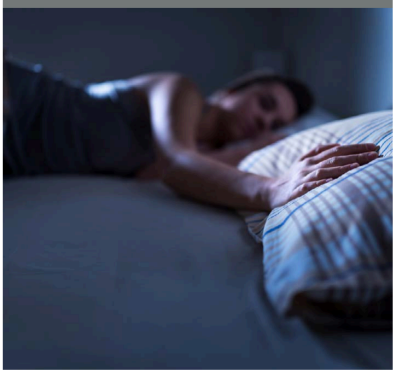
DEATH OF A SPOUSE

A study led by Monash University has found that when someone's spouse dies, their loneliness and grief persist regardless of whether they are isolated or supported socially or are self-reliant or healthy. The study, published in the journal *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, and led by world-leading loneliness expert Dr Rosanne Freak-Poli from Monash University, revealed that little can protect a person against the grief of the death of a spouse. "We found that loneliness related to spousal bereavement occurred regardless of low social isolation or high social support," Dr Freak-Poli said. "Additionally, the impact of spousal loss on increasing loneliness is felt uniformly, regardless of gender, wealth or health." According to Dr Freak-Poli, interventions to increase social interaction and support are unlikely to benefit people experiencing spousal bereavement-related loneliness. "What is needed is personalised help with a focus on creating new social connections and routines to form a sense of identity as an individual rather than as a couple," she said. Co-researcher Dr Htet Lin Htun said that many countries were now turning to social prescribing, where healthcare providers recommend activities like cooking classes or walking groups instead of just relying on medication. "It's all about a patient-centred approach, where individuals help design their own plans. For people dealing with the long-term effects of bereavement, this could be a game changer – helping them rebuild routines and find connection through activities tailored to their needs."



your downtime is just spent in front of the television for hours, it reduces your capacity to engage meaningfully with anything or anyone. Research also shows that frequent interruptions and the pressure to multitask negatively impact on the quality of our life and work, and that this avalanche of information is even rewiring our brains, making it harder to sustain our attention span and concentration for extended periods. Dr Murthy says: "Technology can also distract us and occupy our mental bandwidth, make us feel worse about ourselves and our relationships, and diminish our ability to connect with others. Some technology also fans the flames of marginalisation and discrimination, bullying, and other forms of severe social negativity."

Dr Murthy also says a lack of in-person interactions due to our reliance on technology is a key factor for exacerbating feelings of loneliness, as virtual connections often lack the depth of face-to-face connection. Families report diminished quality time, with phones and television competing for attention during meals and conversations. Friendships and romantic relations suffer from a similar dynamic. Social media can add to the problem as constant exposure to curated content fosters feelings of inadequacy and exclusion.

THE EROSION OF LISTENING

The same digital distractions have dulled another essential skill: listening. Checking the phone at the dinner table or when you're with kids at the park has become commonplace. Car rides were once the prime location for conversation; now cars come with screen holders. Listening is crucial for connection because it demonstrates respect, empathy and genuine interest in the other person. It also fosters trust and allows for a deeper understanding of their thoughts and feelings. "The only thing that makes you feel close to someone is when you feel you can be open, and when you feel seen, heard and understood," says author and podcast host Jay Shetty.

However, while technology appears to be a key driver in loneliness, a new article by the University of Arkansas suggests motivated uses of social networking sites for connecting with people and feeling companionship can also play a role in alleviating it. The key here is networking with people, not mindlessly scrolling for hours. "I'm finding that changes to personal networks – feeling closeness and camaraderie with other users social networking – can lead to increased feelings of self-worth, and this relates to lower levels of perceived social isolation, even over time," said lead researcher Brandon Bouchillon. Researchers from Iowa State University found that young adults who limit their social media use to 30 minutes per day scored significantly lower for anxiety, depression, loneliness and there can be benefits to using social media like connecting with friends and family.

For some people, family provides a sense of belonging, understanding and emotional support. When time with family is limited, whether it's through obligations, separations or distance, individuals may feel disconnected or neglected, leading to feelings of loneliness. "We speak of loneliness sometimes as being 'out in the cold', and of the feeling we get from satisfying social connections as 'warmth'," write John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick in their book, *Loneliness*. "Part of the unfairness of loneliness is that it often deprives us of touch and the soothing comfort that it brings."

In dysfunctional families, unhealthy behaviours may also cause you to feel disconnected and lonely. People who experience neglect, abuse, witness violence or addiction, lack of boundaries, differing values and miscommunication in families are also more prone to feelings of loneliness.

Sociologist Eric Klinenberg also believes the decline in communal spaces is contributing to the loneliness epidemic. Between the early 1900s and 1950, Klinenberg says there was a lot of investment in social infrastructure such as libraries, community centres and public pools compared with the existing amenities today. These places

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"WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE LONELY? IT FEELS LIKE BEING HUNGRY: LIKE BEING HUNGRY WHEN EVERYONE AROUND YOU IS READYING FOR A FEAST. IT FEELS SHAMEFUL AND ALARMING."
OLIVIA LAING

allowed people to spend time together outside of their home and their work. Fewer people had cars, spending more time on public transport. People went to the cinema, rather than watching movies on the lounge at home, and they went shopping in stores rather than buying everything online. These small moments of socialising, whether it's with a store attendant or with someone you are sitting next to on the train, helped feed our need for social interaction.

IMPACT ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

Research published in *Nature* suggests that being socially isolated is associated with a 26% increased likelihood of mortality. Loneliness increases our risk of experiencing poorer health outcomes from decreased immunity, increased inflammatory response, elevated blood pressure, decreases in cognitive health, and faster progression of Alzheimer's disease. Research released in January 2025 by the University of Cambridge shows loneliness can also increase the risk of diseases such as heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. The researchers drew this conclusion after studying proteins from blood samples taken from over 42,000 adults recruited to the UK Biobank.

Dr Chun Shen from the University of Cambridge said: "We know that social isolation and loneliness are linked to poorer health, but we've never understood why. Our work has highlighted a number of proteins that appear to play a key role in this relationship, with levels of some proteins in particular increasing as a direct consequence of loneliness."

Feeling lonely may also feed unhealthy habits. "It is important to note that socially isolated people are more likely to engage in unhealthy lifestyles, including smoking, poor diet and poor sleep habits and not engaging in social activities," says Fereshteh Mehrabi, from the Department of Psychology at Concordia University.

It is also no surprise that higher levels of loneliness are related to more severe mental health symptoms. While loneliness is most commonly examined with depression, anxiety has been found to also play a role, with evidence from large population studies indicating that anxiety increases the odds of feeling lonely. The Harvard researchers also found a strong correlation between loneliness and mental health concerns. In the report, 81% of adults who were lonely also said they suffered with anxiety or depression compared to 29% of those who were less lonely. They also noted a complex interaction between troubled feelings, where loneliness, anxiety, and depression all feed into each other.

Writer, engineer and philosophy student Stephan Joppich writes in his blog: "This loneliness-induced coldness didn't just feel distressing. It also felt eternal. Heck, it was self-reinforcing. The warming smile of a stranger left me cold. They're just pretending, I thought. Surely, they're not smiling at me. Similarly, socialising with friends gave me momentary hope, but there was literally no way to break the ice. Being with friends just reminded me of my inability to connect. And it spawned seeds of doubt if I actually had friends – or ever had had them. I craved to be around people but hated to be around them."

This passage perfectly describes the sometimes cruel cycle of loneliness. Social neuroscientist John T. Cacioppo explains that while the unpleasant nature of loneliness may motivate a 'lonely' individual to make attempts to connect with others, they are also more likely to be hypervigilant to social threats. This hypervigilance predisposes the lonely individual to seek and find evidence that people around them do not want to connect or are less trustworthy. The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis is a biological mechanism that responds to threats and has previously been shown to be activated more in lonely people compared with non-lonely people.

Furthermore, 'lonely' individuals show fewer prosocial behaviours towards others in an attempt to protect themselves from social rejection. This in turn increases the risk of being rejected by others, making them an active participant in a self-perpetuating cycle of loneliness. Hence, simply inviting a 'lonely' individual to join a group or interact with others provides either minimal or transient relief from loneliness, particularly once this has become a chronic experience or cycle.

Cacioppo also found that loneliness can be 'transmissible' throughout social networks in the community. Specifically, those who are

TIME ALONE INCREASES SENSITIVITY TO THREATS

According to the latest findings from a cognitive neuroscience experiment conducted at the University of Cambridge, people in their late teens experience an increased sensitivity to threats after just a few hours left in a room on their own – an effect that endures even if they are interacting online with friends and family. This alertness can cause people to feel anxious and uneasy. The authors of the study say that isolation and loneliness might lead to excessive "threat vigilance", even when plugged in online, which could negatively impact mental health. "Periods of isolation in adolescents might increase their vulnerability to the development of anxiety, even when they are connected virtually," said Emily Towner, study lead author from Cambridge's Department of Psychology.



CARERS NEED CARE

New research from the University of Zurich, based on data from more than 28,000 caregivers in three countries, shows that the longer individuals spend caring for loved ones, the more their wellbeing suffers, regardless of the caregiving context. The results show a consistent drop in life satisfaction and emotional health, with an increase in loneliness and anxiety. They found that the more time people spent on caregiving tasks, the more their wellbeing suffered, regardless of gender.

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THE RURAL COFFEE CARAVAN, UK

The Rural Coffee Caravan delivers information and friendship across Suffolk in the UK. The caravan gets out and about to provide a friendly drop-in space for over 5,000 people a year to reconnect over a coffee and a piece of cake. In addition, the organisation has set up MeetUpMondays, bringing people together at 35 regular free coffee mornings in cafés and pubs across Suffolk. People using the caravan can have a wide range of needs but the predominant one is the need to be with other people and just connect with conversation. The portable meeting space enables people to find out what is going on in their community, what services they can access and to develop what they think their community needs. Ann Osborn, Director of Rural Coffee Caravan, says, "Through visiting the caravan, people have gained access to benefits, services and information they need. They have set up community groups and made new friends. They have left their house and spoken with someone and felt valued and appreciated. They have been able to give back to others by volunteering their time and developing a sense of belonging through their volunteering and/or reconnecting with neighbours."
It's the philosophy of volunteers of the Rural Coffee Caravan that every individual they come into contact with should be provided with support tailored to them. The impact of this is that people feel they matter, trust is developed as relationships go beyond just alleviating loneliness.



lonely are also likely to have friends who are lonely, and those friends are more likely to have friends who are lonely and so on; this demonstrates that loneliness can occur up to three degrees of separation from the lonely person. How loneliness is actually transmitted is unknown. One hypothesis is that if lonely individuals show more negative affect and rejecting behaviours, and are less cooperative with those around them, then this is likely to have a negative impact on those around them.

MOVING FORWARD

Due to the nature of loneliness being a complex and deeply personal emotional experience, there's no one strategy to cure it. However, there are many practical steps that offer a path to finding a solution. Harvard researchers state that at least three-quarters of people surveyed highlighted these solutions to loneliness: reach out to family or friends; learn to love myself; learn to be more forgiving of others; find ways to help others.

REACH OUT

Reaching out for support is essential when dealing with loneliness. Many people avoid reaching out because they fear being a burden or being rejected, but the truth is that most people will appreciate being asked to offer support.

A simple phone call, or invitation for a coffee can be the first step toward overcoming loneliness. If you don't have someone you feel comfortable reaching out to, don't hesitate to contact a support group. There are many support groups available including Lifeline, and Headspace for younger people.

SCALE BACK

Most researchers agree that scaling back on social media is important for anyone dealing with feeling of loneliness. "Here's the bottom line," says psychologist Melissa Hunt on her findings on a study on loneliness and social media. "Using less social media than you normally would leads to significant decreases in both depression and loneliness. These effects are particularly pronounced for folks who were more depressed when they came into the study." Hunt stresses that the findings do not suggest that people should stop using social media altogether. In fact, she built the study as she did to stay away from what she considers an unrealistic goal. "It is a little ironic that reducing your use of social media actually makes you feel less lonely," she says, but after her research the findings make sense. "Some of the existing literature on social media suggests there's an enormous amount of social comparison that happens. When you look at other people's lives, particularly on Instagram, it's easy to conclude that everyone else's life is cooler or better than yours."

SPEND TIME WITH FURRY FRIENDS

The Black Dog Institute recommends spending time with animals: "Pets, especially dogs, provide constant companionship and unconditional love – plus their need to be kept active gets you out of the house for essential exercise when you're feeling down," says Rachel Cohen, a clinical psychologist at Black Dog Institute. "They get you active and non-avoiding, while giving you a sense of purpose because you need to care for something beyond yourself."

HELP OTHERS

The Black Dog Institute also recommends volunteering, as it allows us to make meaningful connections with people while establishing a sense of purpose. "You're doing something beyond yourself which is even more satisfying," says Cohen. In Australia, Volunteering Australia is the national peak body and allows you to search for available positions based on your skills and location.

UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN UNIQUE SITUATION

Interventions that focus solely on providing more social opportunities to the 'lonely' individual have shown minimal benefits. Indeed, researchers have found that the most effective interventions offer a two-tier approach; addressing maladaptive cognition about others via cognitive-behavioural oriented interventions, in addition to offering social opportunities.

So while it's important to foster social connections, to really tackle chronic feelings of loneliness professional help is key to help

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"LONELINESS AND THE FEELING OF BEING UNWANTED IS THE MOST TERRIBLE POVERTY."
MOTHER TERESA

you understand your own personal feelings, motivations, barriers and challenges and what you personally need to feel connected.

CULTURE THAT CARES

Among their own recommendations, the Harvard researchers stress the need to promote a culture that cares and serves others. "Collective service can provide important connections that relieve loneliness," they state, as well as "cultivate meaning and purpose and mitigate mental health challenges".

They also urge public and private leaders to build up social infrastructure in order to help people develop meaningful relationships with others. Three-quarters of those surveyed said that they wanted "more activities and fun community events" where they live, as well as "public spaces that are more accessible and connection-focused like green spaces and playgrounds".

BUILDING STRONG CONNECTIONS

For those looking to learn how to build stronger connections with people, Dr Brené Brown suggests focusing on developing connections through vulnerability, courage and empathy.

One of her key teachings revolves around the importance of vulnerability in forming authentic connections. In her book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, she argues that vulnerability is not a weakness, but rather a strength that fosters trust and connection.

She believes that only when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable – by showing our true selves, expressing our feelings and taking emotional risks – can we truly connect with others. Her research highlights that many people fear vulnerability because it opens them up to the possibility of rejection or judgement. She encourages us to embrace vulnerability as an essential part of being human and cultivating deeper relationships. While building strong connections requires vulnerability, it is also essential to establish healthy boundaries. Setting boundaries doesn't mean rejecting others or being distant; it simply means recognising what you need to feel safe, respected, and valued.

Another key concept in Dr Brown's work is the power of empathy. She emphasises that empathy – being able to connect with someone's feelings without judgement – is essential for building strong relationships. She explains that empathy requires active listening and a willingness to sit with another person's discomfort.

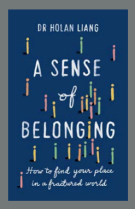
It's not about offering solutions or fixing the problem, but rather about being present with the person in their experience. By practising empathy, we can create a sense of belonging and support, which helps to strengthen bonds between individuals.

Building strong, meaningful relationships isn't just about networking or socialising for the sake of it; it's about nurturing bonds that genuinely enrich our lives. Whether personal or professional, strong human connections form the foundation for our emotional and physical wellbeing. Building these connections takes effort, but the rewards are great, providing a sense of belonging and purpose. Strong connections are also a source of comfort during tough times and a place for celebrating life's joys. Whether it's with family, friends, coworkers, or even strangers, human relationships are the fabric that weaves our experiences together, allowing us to grow, learn, and thrive.

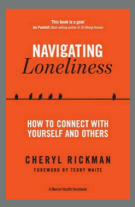
If you have feelings of loneliness or isolation, please don't go it alone. Whether it's getting in touch with your friends and family or meeting with a professional (such as a counsellor or doctor), the best thing you can do for yourself is to reach out today.

WHERE TO SEEK HELP:
lifeline.org.au
endingloneliness.com.au
toolkit.lifeline.org.au
friendsforgood.org.au
headspace.org.au

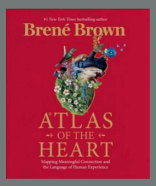
GOOD READS



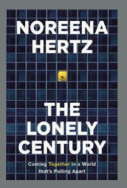
In her book, **A Sense of Belonging**, Dr Holan Liang, one of the UK's top psychiatrists, shares how sense of belonging and the crisis of identity cuts to the heart of the modern epidemic of anxiety and depression.



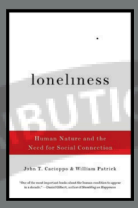
Navigating Loneliness by Cheryl Rickman shares actionable strategies on how to support and maintain existing relationships, foster new connections and how to shift your perspective about community and belonging.



In **Atlas of the Heart**, Dr Brené Brown explores 87 of the emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human and walks us through a new framework for cultivating meaningful connection.



The Lonely Century by Noreena Hertz is a thought-provoking account of how we built a lonely world, how the pandemic accelerated the problem, and what we must do to come together again.



Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection was written by a social neuroscientist, John T. Cacioppo, who has conducted years and years of research on the effects that loneliness has on the human condition. He examined how feeling isolated and alone can affect us.



In **Sit, Stay, Grow**, trauma counsellor Angelika von Sanden has written a joyful guide to learning from the dog in your life.