



# The Expressions of Being Alone **WORKBOOK**

A SELF-EXPLORATION OF  
SOLITUDE AND LONELINESS

CONCORDIA

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# Welcome

We created this workbook to support your exploration of the different expressions of being alone, and as a response to the tremendous global change we have been living since March 2020. With this workbook we hope to offer care to our community and to you. By moving through this workbook, you will be able to read recent research and learn from our clinical experience. In the book you will be guided to draw from your personal experiences and from wisdom you have gained in the past so that you can identify personal steps or strategies that will support you.

If you are reading this, you are taking a courageous step towards bettering your life and deepening your self-understanding. Change can be terrifying for many people, yet here you are, ready to take a look at what is hard, in hopes of making a difference in your life. Inhale, exhale, and let's get started.



# What's in it for you?

THEORY, RESEARCH & EXERCISES TO HELP

1

Deepen your understanding of the expressions of being alone

2

Gain insight into your relationship with the different experiences of being alone

3

Identify and practice how to cope with being alone

4

Implement changes to live a more connected, meaningful, and peaceful life

# Introduction

## CONNECTING MATTERS

Reading the title of our workbook and understanding that there are different expressions of being alone might surprise you! If you are new to the experience of solitude or struggling with loneliness, you are not alone in your journey.

Human connection is an evolutionary basic need. It is a classroom for self-exploration, creating meaning, and understanding our existential purpose. Social support is also linked to growth and resilience in the face of trauma or natural disasters (Saltzman et al., 2020). Often, in North America, being alone is not outwardly valued and may even be considered a source of stigma or shame. Anecdotal and scientific research demonstrate how hard loneliness is on physical, emotional, mental, and interpersonal health (ex: Lim, 2018; Peltzer & Pengpid, 2017). However, studies also show the benefits of taking alone time and how solitude can help with identity formation, connection to your authentic self, understanding your values, and practicing emotion regulation (Thuy-vy et al., 2019).



# Introduction

## OUR COMMUNITY IN THE TIME OF COVID

As we write this workbook, in-person human connection is limited by Covid-19 precautions. During this time, we have been faced with many more opportunities to experience all expressions of being alone. You will see in this workbook that emerging research shows that the prolonged measures of social distancing and isolation have been difficult for student mental health, and this finding extends outside the university context. While the pandemic highlighted the themes discussed here, they are certainly not confined to this specific time period. We hope this workbook will be an enduring resource for you.

It can be both difficult and comforting to embrace solitude and heal the pain of past and present loneliness. Thus, we created an online workshop at Concordia University called The Expressions of Being Alone, where we work collaboratively with students to reflect on how humans cope with these experiences, which became the basis of this workbook. To learn more about our workshops and wellness activities at Concordia, visit: [concordia.ca/zendens](https://concordia.ca/zendens)



# Introduction

## MINDFULLY USING THE WORKBOOK

In this workbook, you will be asked to deeply reflect on your life and to take steps that lead to change implementation. You will have access to resources that include scientific articles, videos, podcasts, websites, and readings for an interactive learning approach to unlock some fears and overcome setbacks.

The journey through the different pages of the workbook could bring forward difficult emotions, thoughts, and body sensations. We encourage that you allow yourself the time and space that you need to care for your reactions as they arise. Deep breathing and completing these pages in a physical environment that is calm, reassuring, and has few distractions can help. You will be asked to be an active participant as you read through these pages. It can be helpful to write on the pages or to dedicate a document or journal for your work on the expressions of being alone.

Although we created this resource for Concordia students, you may find that others could benefit from the words or exercises proposed in this workbook. Thus, feel free to share with your loved ones, friends, family, and strangers. As inspired by Dr. Sachiko Nagasawa and her Covid-19 Anxiety Workbook ([baypsychology.ca/workshops](http://baypsychology.ca/workshops)), we ask that in exchange for the sharing of this workbook, you engage in one act of kindness.

Please note that although this workbook may feel therapeutic, it does not replace therapy or the professional services provided by licensed healthcare professionals. If you would like to talk to someone about the things in the workbook, refer to the Order of Psychologists or to our website: [concordia.ca/mentalhealth](http://concordia.ca/mentalhealth)



# Chapter I

WHAT ARE THE EXPRESSIONS OF BEING ALONE?



# Preliminary Reflection

## AS WE BEGIN

When you think of being alone, what immediately comes to mind? In what way does your body shift when you focus on the topic? Do you feel tension or do you find yourself softening in a particular area of your body? Maybe a memory, smell, or sensation comes to mind. Do you connect to a wave of emotions?

Inhale, Exhale, Pause. Notice, with simplicity and curiosity, how aloneness can impact your heart, mind, and body.

WRITE DOWN THE PARTS OF YOUR EXPERIENCE THAT  
STOOD OUT TO YOU:

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There is a deep connection between the physical, emotional, and mental experience of loneliness that is rooted in our evolutionary biology and environmental experiences. Being alone can leave us feeling exposed to an evolutionary threat, a historical threat, or even an actual threat.

WHAT FEARS DO YOU EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU ARE  
ALONE?

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# Preliminary Reflection

CONTINUE BY ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING



WRITE DOWN A FEW WORDS THAT REPRESENT BEING ALONE FOR YOU:

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WHEN YOU THINK OF BEING ALONE, WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND?

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WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DO YOU MAKE OF OTHERS WHEN YOU SEE THEM ON THEIR OWN?

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WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DO YOU THINK OTHERS MAKE OF YOU WHEN THEY SEE YOU ON YOUR OWN?

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# Preliminary Reflection

WHAT DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU'RE ALONE?

Highlight all that apply:

SAD	BETRAYED	ENERGETIC
POWERLESS	JEALOUS	GRATEFUL
GRIEF	RESENTFUL	CALM
DESPAIR	HUMILIATED	OPEN
HOPELESS	DISRESPECTED	SAFE
LONELY	ANXIOUS	CURIOUS
ABANDONED	EXPOSED	JOYFUL
ISOLATED	NERVOUS	FREE
ASHAMED	INSIGNIFICANT	CONFIDENT
EMBARRASSED	WORTHLESS	CREATIVE
GUILTY	FRIGHTENED	INSPIRED
DISSAPOINTED	OVERWHELMED	RESPECTED
INFERIOR	PRESSURED	AROUSED
DISGUSTED	INDIFFERENT	PLAYFUL
APPALLED	BORED	CONTENT
NUMB	CONFUSED	PROUD
EMPTY	ACCEPTING	COURAGEOUS
WITHDRAWN	AWE	ACCEPTED
ANNOYED	CURIOUS	VALUED
ANGRY	WISE	HOPEFUL

Do any other feelings or experiences come to mind?

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# Definitions

## MOVING THROUGH THE CONTINUUM

The expressions of being alone can be considered as a continuum of experiences that range from loneliness to solitude. There will likely be different moments in your life where you feel alone and at peace and other moments where you feel alone and upset. Even similar situations can be experienced differently across your lifetime.



Where you find yourself on the continuum is informed by the emotional experience you have while being alone. In addition, your perception of your relationships and how they support you can deeply impact your experience of being alone.

# Definitions

TO GUIDE YOU IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING

## **SOLITUDE**

Your social desires are met and you feel connected to others when you spend time alone

## **LONELINESS**

Your social desires are not met and you feel distressed when you spend time alone

## **CULTURAL ISOLATION**

You have the absence of, divergence from, or ambiguity towards your cultural environment

## **SITUATIONAL LONELINESS**

Your loneliness is maintained/reinforced by external contexts like COVID-19 precautions

\*See the following page for more in depth definitions

# Definitions

## SOLITUDE

In solitude, your social desires are met and you feel connected to the individuals in your life, despite being alone in the actual moment. This means that you can be physically alone and all the while feel connected to others. Therefore, your emotional experience will be very different from loneliness such that it will be pleasant, calm, soothing, joyous, peaceful, and perhaps many of the other emotions detailed on the previous page (Ost Mor et al., 2020).



# Definitions

## LONELINESS & CULTURAL ISOLATION

Your interpretation and appraisal of the type of aloneness you are experiencing impacts your emotional response to being alone. More specifically, when you are socially isolated, you are estranged from social connections or have very few people in your life. In addition, you can be socially isolated and experience the whole continuum of aloneness, which can also vary across time.

Loneliness occurs as a result of being socially isolated and feeling distress due to wishing for more social relationships in your life. In essence, you are distressed by either the lack of quantity or quality, or even both, of your relationships (Liu et al., 2020). The emotional appraisal of loneliness is broadly qualified as negative. Can you identify which emotions are tied to loneliness on page 10?

Cultural isolation is the absence of, divergence from, or ambiguity of the cultural and/or linguistic environment. Evidently, loneliness can show up even when you are surrounded by others. This is a very difficult experience for many and can be especially confusing (Sawir et al., 2008).

When beginning to explore loneliness, it can feel overwhelming. It is helpful to specify which areas of your life are impacted by loneliness: intimate relationships, family, friends, academic, workplace, community, culture, and or country. It can be surprising to learn that it is possible to feel deeply connected in one or a few dimensions of your life and to still feel overwhelming loneliness. The overarching loneliness can cause disarray in your other relationships. You might feel like they are failing you, or you might doubt the relationships that you are currently engaging in. Identifying the areas in which you experience loneliness can be a powerful key for coping since it can direct you towards more specific actions.

# Definitions

## SITUATIONAL LONELINESS FOR COVID-19

Situational loneliness is maintained and reinforced by an external context like COVID-19 social distancing measures. Preliminary research began exploring the hypothesis that extraverted people, known as individuals who feel energized by others, who are warm, gregarious, and seek to do activities, may struggle more with the situational social isolation of COVID-19 (Mijumbi, 2020; Wijngaards et al., 2020). In clinical practice, we have witnessed extraverted clients struggling with adapting to social isolation measures. Clients report feeling limited in their means for connection and missing in-person moments. Although research on this topic is nascent and more studies are needed to fully understand the connection between the introversion and extraversion spectrum and the impact of social isolation, preliminary research suggests that introverts adapted to social isolation methods more optimally (Wijngaards et al., 2020). Early results also explored the different struggles that introverts and extraverts face during COVID isolation. While extraverts can miss their people and activities, they can plan for online social activities and are usually quicker to seek support. In addition, introverts may feel overstimulated with constant online communication and be just as drained as if they were in person (Thomas et al., 2020). In our practice, we have even noticed some introverts enjoy having less pressure to connect and extraverts exploring positive experiences through solitude.

HOW HAVE THE COVID-19 SAFETY PRECAUTIONS  
IMPACTED YOUR SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL  
CONNECTIONS?

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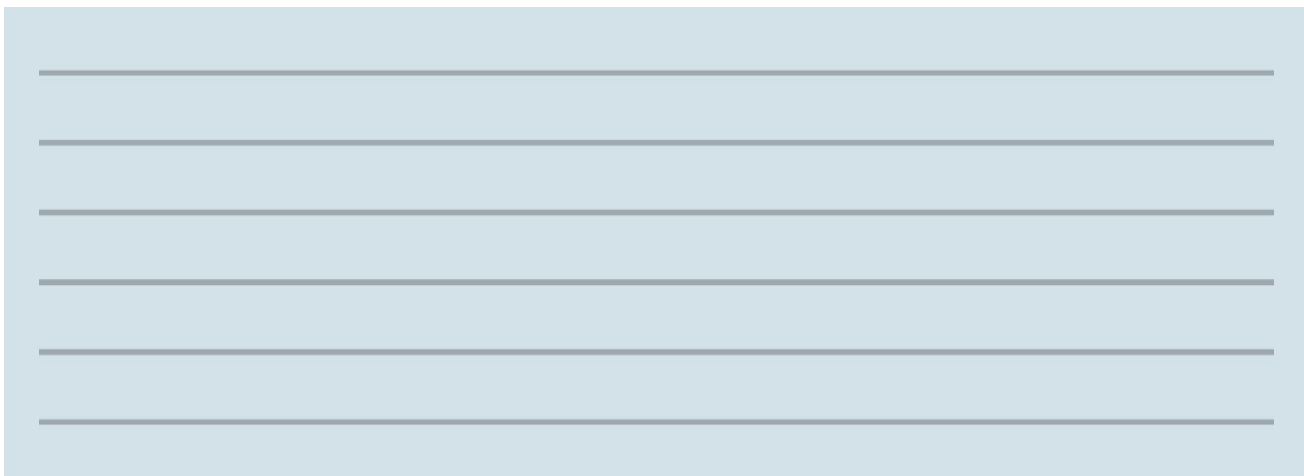


# Loneliness Stereotypes

## BREAKING DOWN PRECONCEPTIONS

It is possible that you have felt guilt or shame regarding loneliness. Biological and social norms lean towards supporting connection, and stigma towards aloneness exists. Individuals who are alone can be met with judgment and pity. Studies show that individuals who enjoy alone time can be perceived as having less desirable personality traits. Research reveals that both neurotic (i.e. those who are prone to negative emotions like worry, have difficulty adapting, and are rigid) and extraverted (i.e. those who show positive emotions and are socially energized) teens struggled most with being alone. Individuals who were high in openness (i.e. creative, curious, and with a wide range of interests) and conscientiousness (i.e. goal-oriented, dependable, and organized) were more comfortable with solitude. These findings contradict the “typical” loner stereotype, showing that experiencing solitude or alone time is also tied to positive personality types (Lin et al., 2020).

In the preliminary reflection on page 9, we asked you what assumptions you make of yourself or others when you are alone. How does learning more about the research, the definitions and the continuum change or maintain your assumptions and biases of aloneness?



# Expressions Reflection

Now that you know more about being alone, take time to explore your connections at each of the levels below. Ask yourself how you feel, how each contributes to your life and identify individuals/groups that you can connect with.

## INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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## PEERS/COLLEAGUES

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## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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## COMMUNITY

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## FRIENDSHIPS

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## CULTURAL CONTEXTS

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# Summary

## TAKEAWAYS FOR THE EXPRESSIONS

You can find yourself moving along the continuum between loneliness and solitude. Where you are on the continuum can be influenced by many factors, such as the emotional appraisal of your circumstances, the number of connections you have, the quality of your connections, how supported you feel by these connections, your biases about being alone, and your self-concept in these contexts.

The following chapters will help you deepen your self-awareness by delving deeper into the themes of solitude and loneliness, exploring strategies to help you cope with the expressions of being alone, and promoting long-lasting, active change in your life.





# Chapter II

ENJOYING SOLITUDE

# Preliminary Reflection

## YOUR EXPERIENCES OF SOLITUDE

Building on your frame of reference can help you integrate your learning so that you can make changes that are relevant for you. Before we explore solitude more deeply, take a moment to answer the following questions:

WHAT DOES SOLITUDE LOOK LIKE FOR YOU? WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU EXPERIENCE SOLITUDE?

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WHAT STORIES AND MESSAGES ABOUT SOLITUDE HAVE YOU INTERNALIZED FROM YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND/OR SOCIETY?

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# The Benefits of Solitude

## TOP FOUR REASONS TO TAKE ALONE TIME

Social and solitary time are equally important for young adult wellness.

Solitude yields the following benefits:

1

EMOTION REGULATION AND  
STRESS MANAGEMENT

2

ENHANCED DECISION  
MAKING WHICH CAN LEAD  
TO MORE EFFECTIVE  
LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTE  
ETHICAL CHOICES

3

FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND  
SELF-EXPRESSION

4

IDENTITY FORMATION

\*Benefits Cited in Thuy-vy, et al., 2019

# Positive Solitude

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

To provide a more in-depth definition of positive solitude, a recent qualitative study explored the different elements that encompass solitude. Ost Mor and colleagues (2020) found that in order to experience positive solitude, you need three interrelated aspects:

- Choice: Having the choice and freedom in taking alone time
- Agreeableness: Experiencing a positive affective response and a welcomed state of mind
- Meaning-making: Time spent alone is perceived as meaningful

Different categories or contexts can hold the possibility of having positive solitary experiences. These include (1) quietness, (2) experiences in nature or abroad, (3) recreation, hobbies, and routine, (4) spiritual or religious, (5) escapism, (6) controlling stress or thoughts, (7) facilitating achievements. The next page will detail each of these categories more. As you read the definitions, highlight the contexts that could be helpful for you.

Conditions that can support positive solitude are the absence of other individuals, a quiet location, and the above-mentioned contexts. It is necessary to identify the elements that can inspire you to take time alone in order to support your experience of solitude and entice you to continue enjoying your time alone.

# Positive Solitude

## DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

### QUIETNESS

Finding a place or a situation in which to regain calm and peace from daily burdens or to reflect

### EXPERIENCES IN NATURE OR ABROAD

Being in a new environment or away from known places to inspire freedom, gain perspective, and refuel

### RECREATION, HOBBIES AND ROUTINES

Engaging in activities that are useful, creative, or meaningful

### SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS

Connecting to a spiritual practice through meditation or yoga or practicing prayer and activities that connect to faith

### ESCAPISM

Distancing from life stress by doing activities or taking time alone at night/early morning to escape from the current reality

### CONTROLLING STRESS OR THOUGHTS

Taking time alone as a strategy for reflection or emotional regulation

### FACILITATING ACHIEVEMENTS

Taking time alone to improve decision-making, assess achievements, plan, and respect one's own vision of achievement

\*Definitions found in Ost Mor et al., 2020



# Positive Solitude

Imagine yourself experiencing positive solitude in the following situations. What would be your ideal way to spend time alone? What would you be doing or not doing? When and where would this happen?

## QUIETNESS

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## EXPERIENCES IN NATURE OR ABROAD

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## RECREATION, HOBBIES AND ROUTINES

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## ESCAPISM

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## CONTROLLING STRESS OR THOUGHTS

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

## FACILITATING ACHIEVEMENTS

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

# Positive Solitude

## RESEARCH FINDINGS CONTINUED

When considering positive solitude, it is important to distinguish between momentary solitude and constant time alone (Pauly et al., 2017). Constant time alone is detrimental to health, while the positive appraisal of momentary alone time yields benefits. For example, a study specific to graduate students revealed that solitude was helpful when it was chosen, temporary, and when it helped them improve their academic endeavours (Kalubi et al., 2020). You can find the benefits of solitude detailed on page 21.

Understanding the value of spending time alone can be an antidote to college maladaptation. A recent study conducted with college students in the US and Canada found that college maladjustment is strongly linked to the absence of friendships. As a result, researchers suggest that universities emphasize both building social connection AND teaching the value of alone time (Nguyen et al., 2019).



# Taking Alone Time

CHECK ALL THE REASONS THAT APPLY

- HAVING A LOW BATTERY
- CRAVING PERSONAL SPACE TO RECHARGE
- PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS LIKE INTROVERSION
- BEING IN A CREATIVE RUT
- HAVING LOW MOTIVATION
- EXPERIENCING CONFUSING PERSONAL FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS
- NEEDING TO REFLECT
- EXPLORING YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY
- MAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS
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-

# Taking Alone Time

CHECK ALL THE IDEAS THAT APPLY



MEDITATION



MAKING ART



MOVEMENT



EXPLORING NATURE



SPENDING TIME WITH PETS



READING



JOURNALLING



CREATIVE ENDEAVOURS



WATCHING SHOWS OR MOVIES



ORGANIZING AND CLEANING



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# Solitude Reflection

## A SOLITUDE ROLE MODEL

It is possible to access wisdom by allowing ourselves to have creative reflections. As you answer the next questions, allow yourself to be curious as you explore what comes to mind without judgment.

WHO CAN YOU LOOK UP TO AS A MODEL OF ENJOYING SOLITUDE? WHAT DOES ENJOYING ALONE TIME MEAN FOR THEM?

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WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM THIS PERSON TO HELP YOU TO EMBRACE SOLITUDE?

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# Solitude Reflection

## CREATIVE REFLECTION

It is possible to access wisdom by allowing ourselves to have creative reflections. As you answer the next questions, allow yourself to be curious as you explore what comes to mind without judgment.

CONSIDER A PERSON, ANIMAL, OR FICTIONAL CHARACTER WHO THRIVES IN, OR EMBRACES SOLITUDE. WHO OR WHAT COMES TO MIND?

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WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS SYMBOL?

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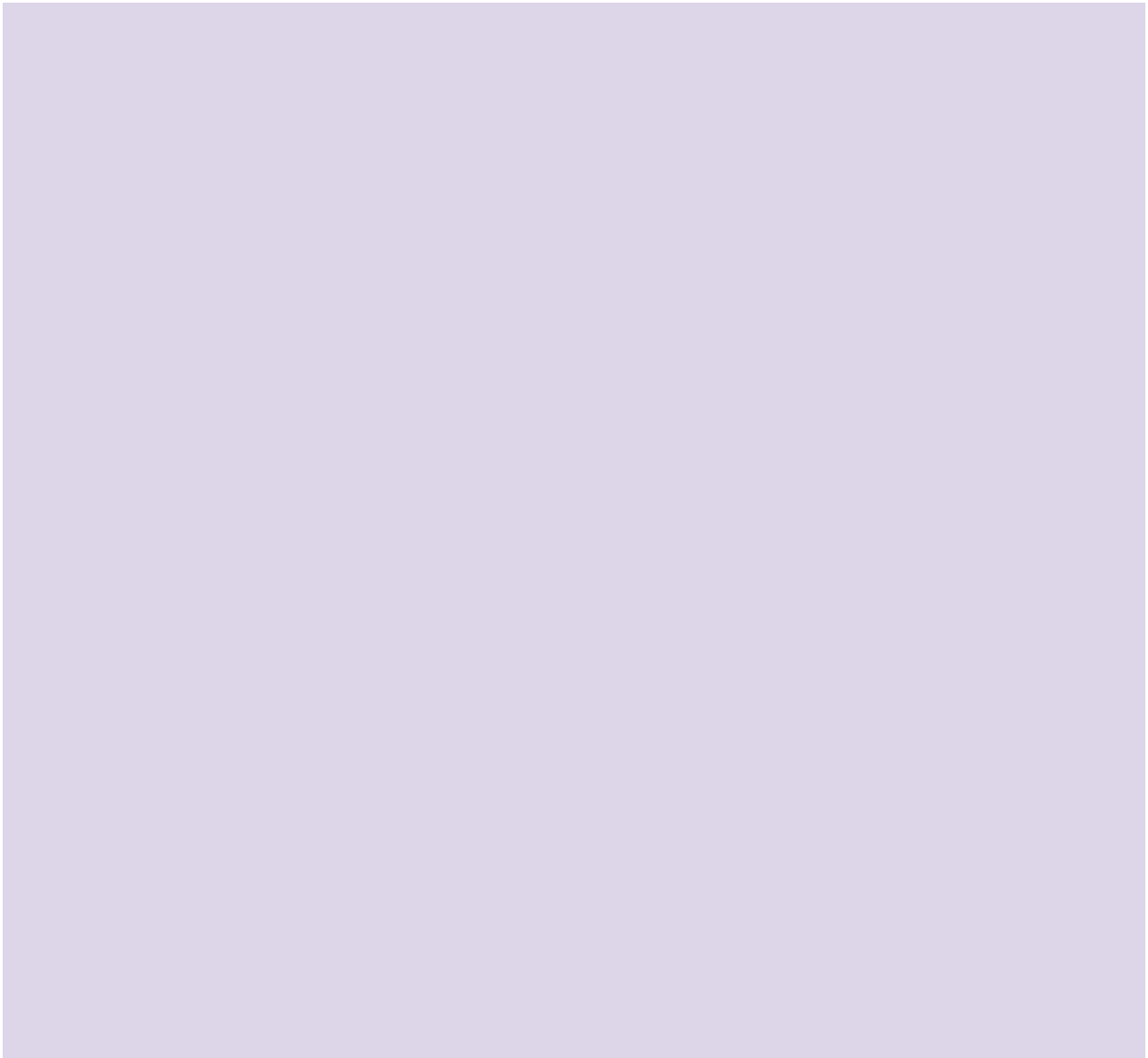
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# Solitude Reflection

## VISUALIZING POSITIVE SOLITUDE

With new insights gained throughout this chapter, take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a time when you were enjoying being alone and felt at peace. What could you see? Smell? Hear? Touch? Write or draw as many details as possible to recall the image vividly.



# Solitude Reflection

## VISUALIZING POSITIVE SOLITUDE CONTINUED

On the previous page, you described or drew a moment when you were experiencing positive solitude. Let's go into more detail by answering the following questions.

WHAT WERE YOU EXPERIENCING EMOTIONALLY?

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WHAT WERE YOUR THOUGHTS?

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WHAT DID YOU DO?

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HOW DID YOUR BODY RESPOND TO THE MEMORY?

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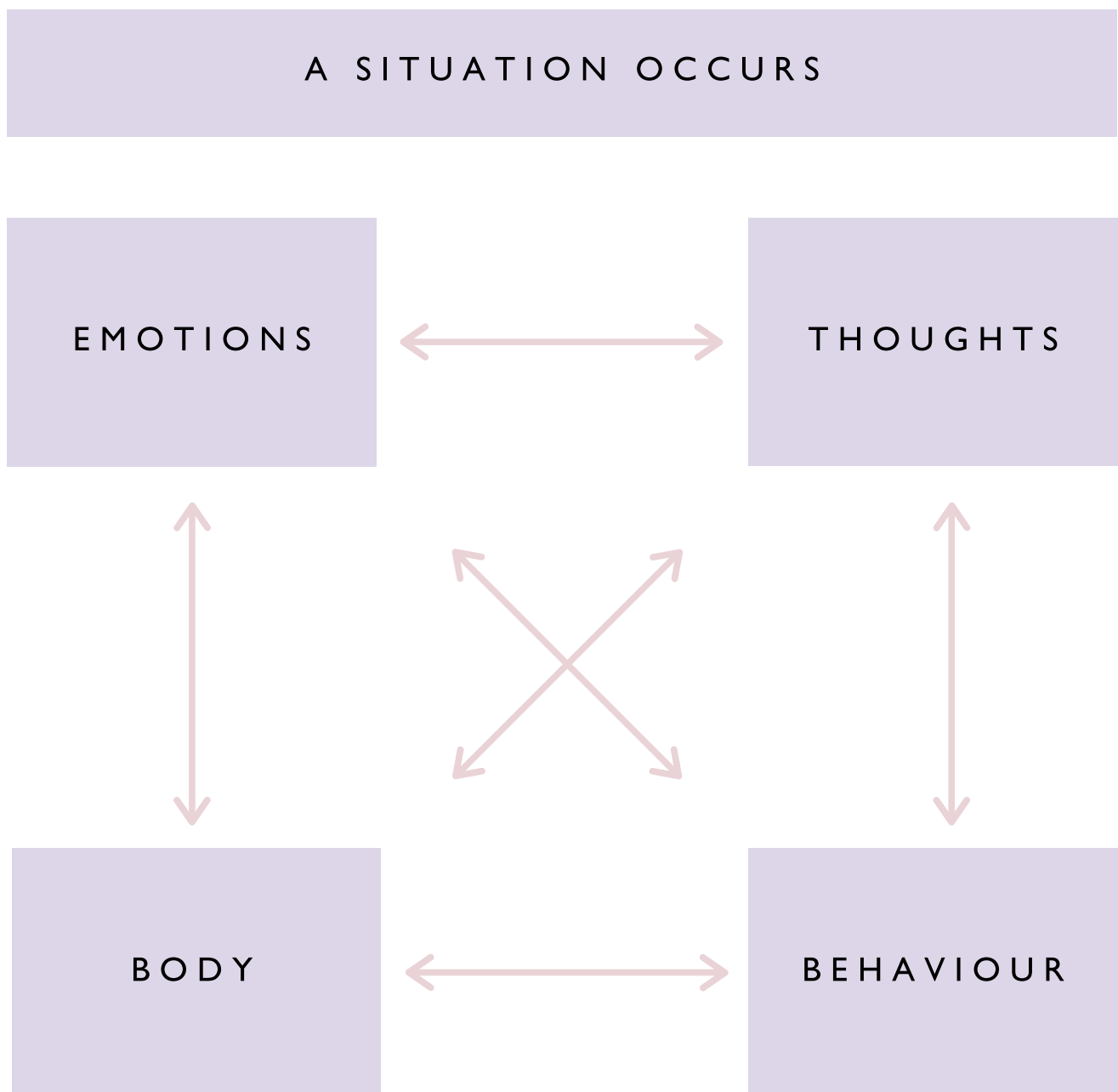
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# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## AND HOW IT IMPACT US

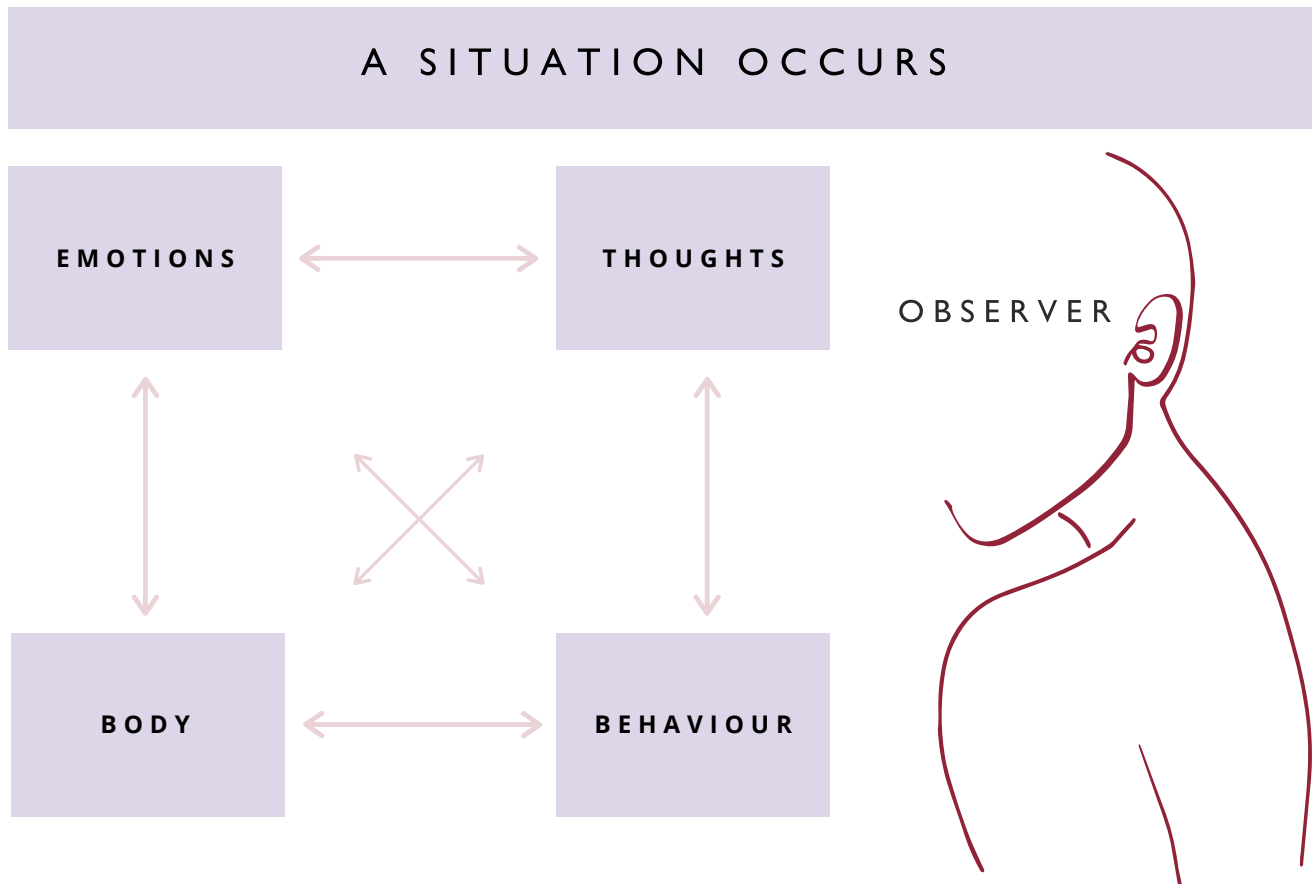
Our emotions, thoughts, behaviours, and body sensations can give us important feedback as to how we experience situations. Each category is necessary for understanding our experience, and when we consider their interrelated impact, we are able to deepen our comprehension.



# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## THE OBSERVER-SELF

Identifying how we respond to situations in the present moment, with as much detail as possible, can help us develop the observer-self. This is the part of ourselves that can witness, from a non-judgemental meta-awareness. Training the observer-self is a key strategy for leading a more empowered and value-based life. It allows us to create internal space between the situation and the immediate response. We are thus able to take action from a place of meaning and value rather than from a place of fear.



In addition, identifying which areas of the model are problematic, or what categories are more or less painful to change, gives us insight into which area to begin making changes. This concept will be expanded in chapter IV.

# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## AN EXAMPLE



## THE SITUATION

The experience of positive solitude happened I was at the summit of a mountain. There was bright sun and a vast view. My dog was with me and we contemplated how lucky we were to be here.

## EMOTIONS

Calm      Present  
Grateful      Proud  
Joyful      Open

## THOUGHTS

"I am lucky."  
"This is the best, my partner would really love being here too."  
"I have perspective here."  
"Things make sense."



## BODY

Heart feels like it is soaring  
Sensation of warmth  
Tired legs  
Energized

## BEHAVIOUR

Walk around the mountain top while looking at the view.  
Stand up facing the sun with my arms open wide.  
Pet and play with my dog.



# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## YOUR EXPERIENCE OF SOLITUDE

You previously visualized a moment of solitude. A strategy for building the observer-self is to collect data. Fill out the boxes with your personal experience. Make sure you put your thoughts in quotations to show that they are thoughts.

### THE SITUATION

### EMOTIONS

### THOUGHTS



### BODY

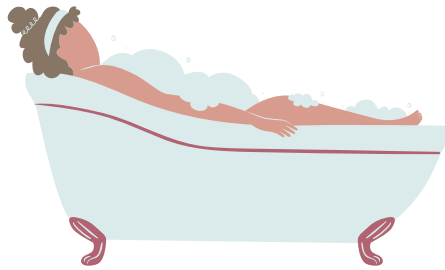
### BEHAVIOUR



# Exercise Reflection

TO WRAP UP THE MODEL EXERCISE

It can sometimes be intense to start collecting data about your life and looking at it more clearly. Take some time to process what the experience was like for you.



WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO COLLECT DATA? DID ANYTHING SUPRISE ME?

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HOW DID THIS BREAKDOWN OF MY SOLITUDE EXPERIENCE HELP ME? HOW CAN THIS RESOURCE SUPPPORT ME IN THE FUTURE?

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# Summary

## THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS FOR SOLITUDE

Positive solitude is determined by making the choice to spend time alone, enjoying the alone time, and making meaning of it. There are different contexts that can influence your time spent alone. Identifying how, when and where you can embrace solitude can inspire you to take the initiative to spend more positive time alone.

Studies clearly show the benefits of understanding the value of alone time and practicing positive solitude. These benefits include emotion regulation, improved decision-making, freedom of self-expression, and identity formation.

We can gain insight on ways to embrace solitude by considering mentors and symbols around us. In addition, emotions, thoughts, behaviours, and our bodies impact each other and contribute to how we experience the world. Using your visualization and creativity to identify these influences in your life are keys to deepening your personal journey of solitude.





# Chapter III

## OVERCOMING LONELINESS

# Preliminary Reflection

TO PERSONALIZE THIS WORKBOOK

Building on your own frame of reference can help you integrate your learning so that you can make changes that are relevant to you. Before we explore loneliness more deeply, take a moment to answer the following questions:



WHAT DOES LONELINESS LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?  
WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU EXPERIENCE LONELINESS?

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WHAT STORIES AND MESSAGES HAVE YOU  
INTERNALIZED FROM YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS,  
COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY REGARDING  
LONELINESS?

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\*See page 12 and 14 for the definition of loneliness



# What is Loneliness?

## THE IMPACT OF LONELINESS

Loneliness is the experience of being estranged from social connections and feeling distressed as a result of an unmet desire for social relationships. Its impact is detrimental to our health.

### THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF LONELINESS

- Anxiety, depression and psychological distress
- Misuse of drugs/alcohol and tobacco
- Technology addictions (social media, smartphone, pornography)
- Decreased confidence, maintains and worsens negative self-perception, and detachment in social situations
- Sense of hopelessness, cynicism, loss of meaning, and increased avoidance behaviours
- Decreased motivation, concentration, and performance
- Academic difficulties, learning burnout, and negative university experiences
- Risky sexual behaviours and aggression
- Sleep issues
- Premature mortality
- High blood pressure and coronary heart disease
- Increased cortisol (stress hormones)

# What is Loneliness?

HIGHLIGHT THE TYPES YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED

People can feel lonely for many reasons or in many different circumstances. Some are connected with life stages, relocations, health, work, or relationship status.

We recommend you visit the following website if you want to learn more about each circumstance.

To know more:  
[loneliness.org.nz/lonely/](https://loneliness.org.nz/lonely/)

L O N E L Y &



HURT

ALONE

AT HOME

COVID-19

LIFE STAGE

WITH OTHERS

RELOCATION

# Loneliness Reflection

## THE LEVELS OF CONNECTION

Knowing that loneliness can happen at multiple levels, in which category does your loneliness appear?

### INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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### PEERS/COLLEAUGES

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### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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### COMMUNITY

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### FRIENDSHIPS

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### CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

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# Loneliness Findings

## WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS IN YOUNG ADULTS

Loneliness is a common experience for young adults. In fact, studies showed that 38-50% of individuals aged between 18-25 years old reported loneliness, and that individuals identifying as women struggled more when compared to men.

Additional studies are needed to explore gender differences when considering the larger spectrum of gender diversity and non-binary identities (Labrague et al., 2020).

Loneliness can predict, maintain, and exacerbate physical and mental health issues. More specifically, it can increase the risk of anxiety and depression. Other impacts of loneliness include: premature mortality, tobacco use, heavy internet usage, aggression, injuries, risky sexual behaviours, sleeping issues, and negative university experiences (Lim, 2018; Peltzer & Pengpid, 2017). Loneliness also has a long-term effects and research finds a negative impact of loneliness between 0.25 to 9 years later. Furthermore, the length and duration of the experience of loneliness, rather than the intensity of loneliness, has a stronger correlation to mental health issues (Loades et al., 2020).

Therefore, loneliness affects a large part of the young adult population, and can have a direct long-term impact on your physical, emotional, and mental health.



# Loneliness Findings

## WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS IN STUDENTS

Although all students can feel lonely at different times in their university degrees, first-year students and graduate students are often more likely to experience being alone. International students are at risk for loneliness with data showing that 65% of international students experience loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008). A study comprised of graduate students revealed that loneliness was difficult when it was involuntary, lasted a long time, and did not help them optimize their work (Kalubi et al., 2020).

Risk factors for loneliness in graduate school include (Ray et al., 2019):

1. Individual: Feeling different from peers, for example, alcohol abstinence, primary caregiving, minority status, studying internationally, or family responsibilities; working full time with limited socializing; and shyness or introversion
2. Interpersonal: competitiveness and exclusionary attitude in the faculty; and faculty relationship concerns such as not being understood or respected
3. Organizational: Faculty culture not prioritizing social connection in program design, course structure, and course load
4. Community: Lack of community as a result of relocation



# Pandemic Loneliness

## WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS

A 2020 study about the link between loneliness and the pandemic in Canada reported that individuals who had lower household incomes (<\$50,000) struggled with greater anxiety, depression, and loneliness — factors that were exacerbated by the pandemic. Findings were similar for individuals living alone or with their parents. Emerging adults (18-30) struggled the most with loneliness during the pandemic times. Emerging adult women may struggle more than men of the same age group, but the results of the study are to be interpreted with caution as fewer men participated in the study, and the data included very few non-binary or genderqueer individuals. This study hypothesized that young women often rely on social cohesion and support to cope with distress. Thus, they would be especially impacted by being disconnected from their support system (Mcquiad et al., 2020).



# Pandemic Loneliness

## WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS

A context unique to the pandemic circumstances is the high level of emerging adulthood loneliness when compared to other age groups (Lisitsa et al., 2020). In addition, a study with Canadian students revealed that loneliness might account for decline in mental health in previously healthy individuals (Hamza et al., 2020). Another study of students at a Swiss university reported that being alone and having less contact with or support from their social network during COVID-19 was associated with a decrease in mental health. These students also worried about the future of their career, their family and friends, and being faced with problems that they usually suppressed (Elmer et al., 2020).

Risk factors for experiencing loneliness for individuals living in the UK in the first wave of the pandemic included (Groarke et al., 2020):

1. Being an emerging adult
2. Romantic relationship status of separated or divorced
3. Diagnosed with depression
4. Struggling with emotion regulation
5. Having sleep difficulties

Interestingly, the research is not all negative. Some students reported that their mental health increased due to decreased unhealthy competition and less fear of missing out.



# Pandemic Loneliness

## SOCIAL MEDIA & WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS

During COVID-19 social distancing measures, young adults used social media more frequently and decreased seeking social support. This is consistent with the research literature that lower social support seeking can be explained both by loneliness and passive social media use. Having more idle time combined with the stress of the pandemic can also explain the increased use of social media. It's important to note that the way we use social media has an impact. The use of social media is nuanced, with active use to connect as opposed to passive use to distract or disconnect (Lisitsa, et al., 2020).

Through their research in 2020, Thomas and colleagues (2020) found that some individuals felt happy while using social media and preferred being with others over social media. From their findings, they propose that the use of social media can be helpful. However, the rituals, consistency, and chronic use of social media can be detrimental for identity development in emerging adults. They also discovered that people who were more introverted, high functioning, had a strong identity, and low loneliness were the most likely to spend time alone without using social media. Therefore, understanding your introversion or extraversion can guide conscious decision-making regarding your social media use so you can use it to connect rather than as a distraction, habit, or as the sole way to boost your mood and generate connection with your loved ones or community.

\*See page 71-73 for more



# Podcast Activity

## LISTEN AND REFLECT

Find a quiet space to listen to or read the transcript of Brene Brown's "Unlocking Us" podcast on Loneliness and Connection with Dr. Vivek Murthy. The questions below will prompt your reflections. We recommend exploring these questions on your own or inviting a trusted other to also listen and respond with you so that you can have a meaningful conversation and connect on the topic.



- How has your understanding of mental, emotional, and physical health changed after listening to the podcast?
- What changed for you when you understood the differences between the types of loneliness? What are some nuances that apply to your life?
- Has shame or stigma kept you from discussing loneliness with others?
- The speakers discuss approaching others for “genuine connection rather than for validation.” How does this relate to your experience when entering exchanges or relationships with others? How could this shift change the way you relate?
- They also explore how relationships are important for problem-solving and encouraging dialogue. What can you start doing today to encourage healing dialogue?
- What story from this episode will you remember?

# Video Activity

## WATCH AND REFLECT

Find a quiet space to watch this [video](#). Notice how you respond to certain parts. You may choose to reflect as you watch or take time after you've finished.



WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN TAKEAWAYS?

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WHICH PART OF THE VIDEO VALIDATED YOUR EXPERIENCES THE MOST?

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WHAT DID YOU LEARN THAT SURPRISED YOU?

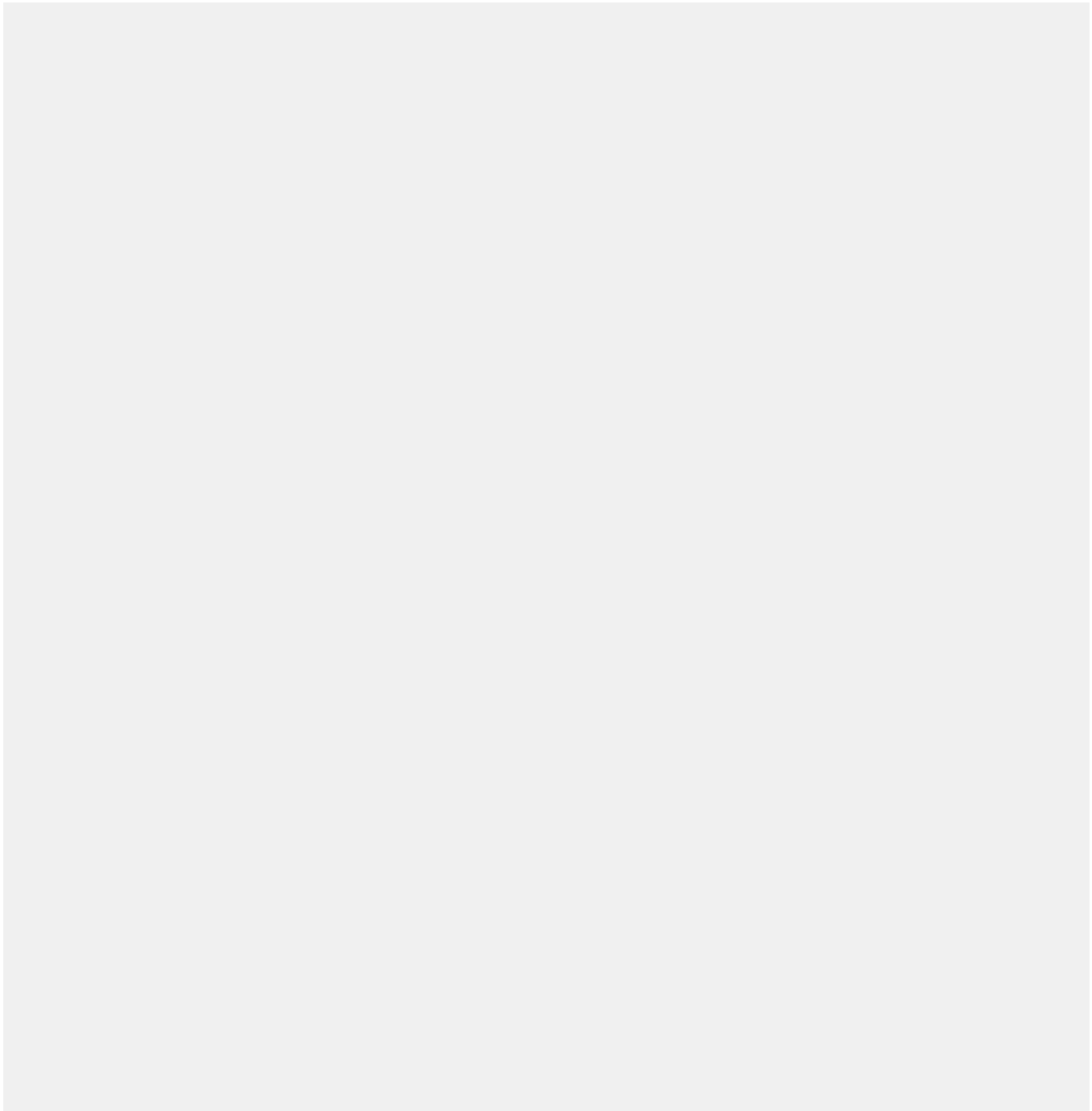
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# Visualization Reflection

## AN EXPERIENCE WITH LONELINESS

Take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a time when you were struggling with loneliness. When did this happen? Where were you when you experienced this moment? What could you see? Smell? Hear? Touch? Write or draw as many details as possible to recall the image vividly.



# Visualization Reflection

AN EXPERIENCE WITH LONELINESS CONTINUED

Now that you have identified a moment when you were struggling with loneliness and have drawn or written the image that came to mind, take a moment to answer the following questions:

WHAT WERE YOU EXPERIENCING EMOTIONALLY?

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WHAT WERE YOUR THOUGHTS?

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WHAT DID YOU DO?

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HOW DID YOUR BODY RESPOND TO THE MEMORY?

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# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## AN EXAMPLE



This exercise can be hard because you have to face the scary thoughts.

## THE SITUATION

It was late at night and I knew I needed to get sleep, but I felt so alone so I watched television for hours to numb my feelings.

### EMOTIONS

Ashamed  
Lonely  
Irritated  
Uncertain  
Bored  
Worthless  
Powerless

### THOUGHTS

"I have no friends."  
"I am unlovable."  
"I will always be alone."  
"I have people who love me but feel so alone."  
"No one can hurt me if i am alone. I am better off."

### BODY

Heart racing  
Tense shoulders and neck  
Numb sensation  
Heavy chest  
Sweaty hands  
Warm or flushed face

### BEHAVIOUR

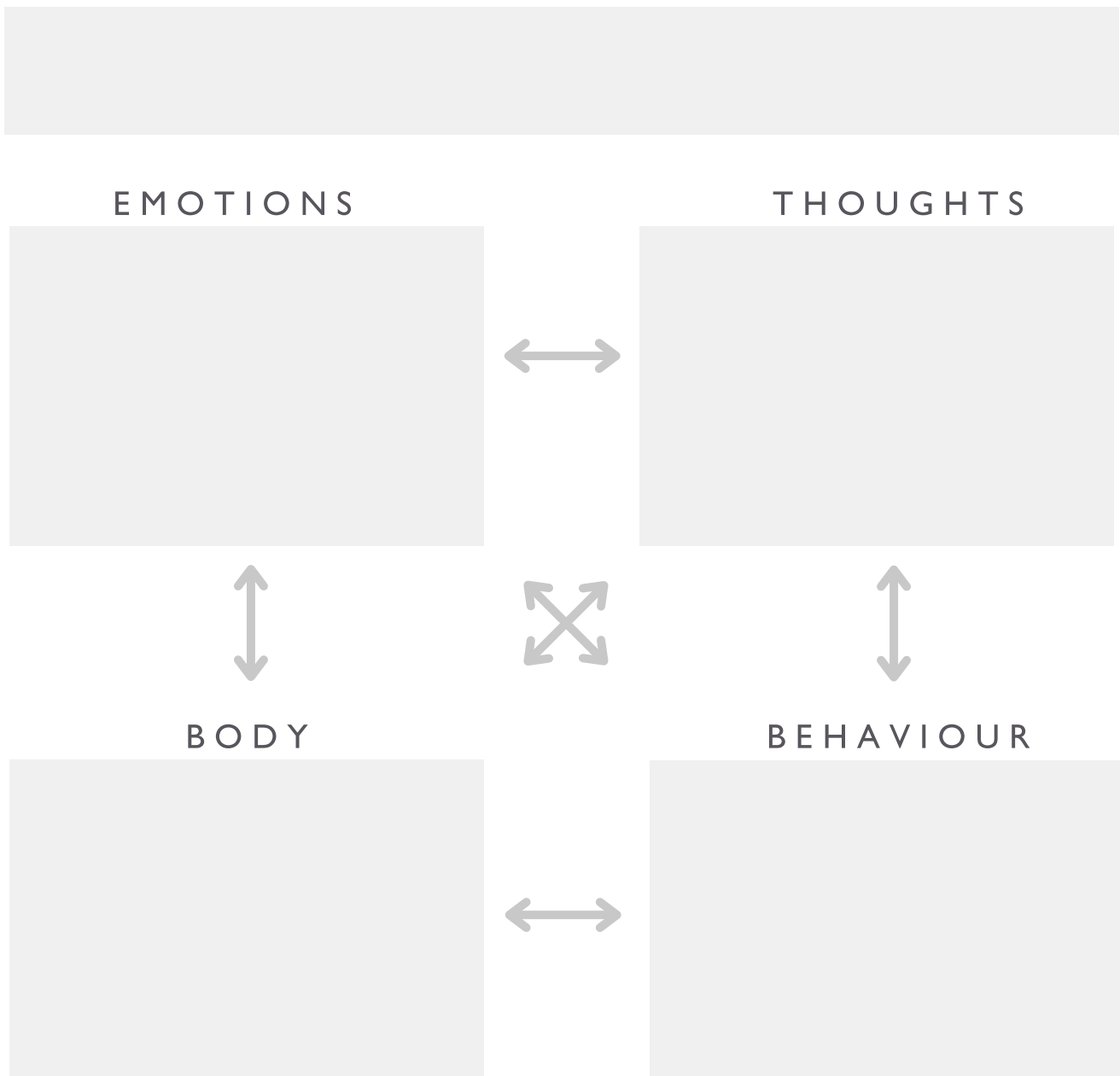
Reject invitations  
Stay home and avoid others  
Call home  
Change eating patterns  
Alcohol or drug misuse  
Avoidance

# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## YOUR EXPERIENCE OF LONELINESS

You previously visualized a moment of loneliness. A strategy for building the observer-self is to collect data of difficult experiences. Fill out the boxes with a personal experience. Make sure you put your thoughts in quotations to show that they are thoughts.

### THE SITUATION



# Summary

## LONELINESS

Loneliness is emotional distress regarding the discrepancy between desired social connection and actual social connection. It has negative repercussions on physical, emotional, and mental health. As many as 38-50% of individuals between the ages of 18-25 experience loneliness, and 65% of international students also share the experience of loneliness.

The video on loneliness and Brene Brown's interview on her podcast are presented as resources to help you deepen your understanding of loneliness and to validate your experience.

Identifying the negative spiral that occurs when you are feeling lonely is an immense step towards understanding yourself better, developing the observer-self, and identifying areas where you need more support when you're experiencing loneliness.



A watercolor splash graphic with soft, blended colors of light blue, grey, and peach, centered on the page.

# Chapter IV

## COPING STRATEGIES



# Preliminary Reflection

TO PERSONALIZE THIS WORKBOOK

Building on your own frame of reference can help you integrate your learning so that you can make changes that are relevant for you.

Before we explore strategies more deeply, take a moment to answer the following questions:



WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE YOU COME UP WITH ON YOUR OWN TO HELP YOU EMBRACE SOLITUDE AND/OR COPE WITH LONELINESS IN THE PAST?

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AS YOU WORKED THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT, WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU MADE?

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# Protective Factors

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Studies have identified general directions to counteract the experience of loneliness, including increasing personal resilience, practicing positive coping behaviours, and augmenting perceived social support (Labrague et al, 2020). A study specific to graduate students revealed that the individuals' personality style, their academic/social contexts, as well as having both peer and supervisor support, can be protective factors against the experience of loneliness (Kalubi et al., 2020).

In addition, involvement in organizations, participation in activities that encourage socialization, program design that encourages social connection, and seeking support from outside the academic context through building social networks and communities, were protective factors for graduate students in this study (Ray et al., 2019).

Protective factors for counteracting negative effects of loneliness in the pandemic include cohabiting and/or living with a loved one. To help individuals cope with pandemic loneliness, studies suggest teaching and optimizing emotion regulation skills, building social support, and improving sleep hygiene and sleep quality (Groarke, et al., 2020).



# Microaggressions

## THEMES AND HOW STUDENTS COPE D

A qualitative study specific to undergraduate international students from East and South Asia at Canadian schools sheds insight on themes and coping mechanisms the students used when faced with microaggressions (Houshmand et al., 2014).

### WHAT STUDENTS EXPERIENCED

- Excluded and avoided
- Ridiculed for accent
- Rendered invisible
- Disregarded international values and needs
- Ascription of intelligence
- Environmental microaggressions (structural barriers on campus)

### WAYS STUDENTS COPE D

- Engaging with their own cultural groups
- Withdrawing from academic spheres
- Seeking comfort in the surrounding multicultural milieu

Microaggressions and racism can have an impact on loneliness. This is a very important topic and it deserves to be treated in a separate and deep extension that exceeds the scope of our workbook.

# Mindfulness and Compassion

## FINDINGS

Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) writes that the philosophy of mindfulness rests in the notion that the practice of mindfulness connects us to all living beings and to nature. Mindfulness — a non-judgmental presence and awareness of one's experience in the present moment — has a negative association with depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness. Research revealed that the combination of low mindfulness and high aloneness can lead to the experience of loneliness (Olivia & Johnston, 2020).

Compassion is the recognition of other's suffering with the desire to alleviate or take action to support the other through generating hope. In her work on compassion, Dr. Kelly McGonigal describes that we have evolutionary and biological tendencies towards compassion for others and we can develop this compassion towards ourselves as well. Dr. Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion describes self-compassion as three interrelated elements that include mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity. Her research shows that by holding our experiences in a kind, non-judgmental awareness, recognizing our harsh internal dialogues, and remembering that it is part of the human experience to suffer, we can remember that we are connected to others through our pain and through our growth.



# Mindfulness and Compassion

## APPLYING THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS

Increasing our mindfulness and compassion practices can be powerful agents to counteract the effects of loneliness and feel less alone in our loneliness. Although the idea that we are not alone in being lonely can be discouraging, a different perspective would suggest that this could motivate us to take action and emotional risks to connect with others. We can consider that others may also be feeling alone or have a wish to connect.

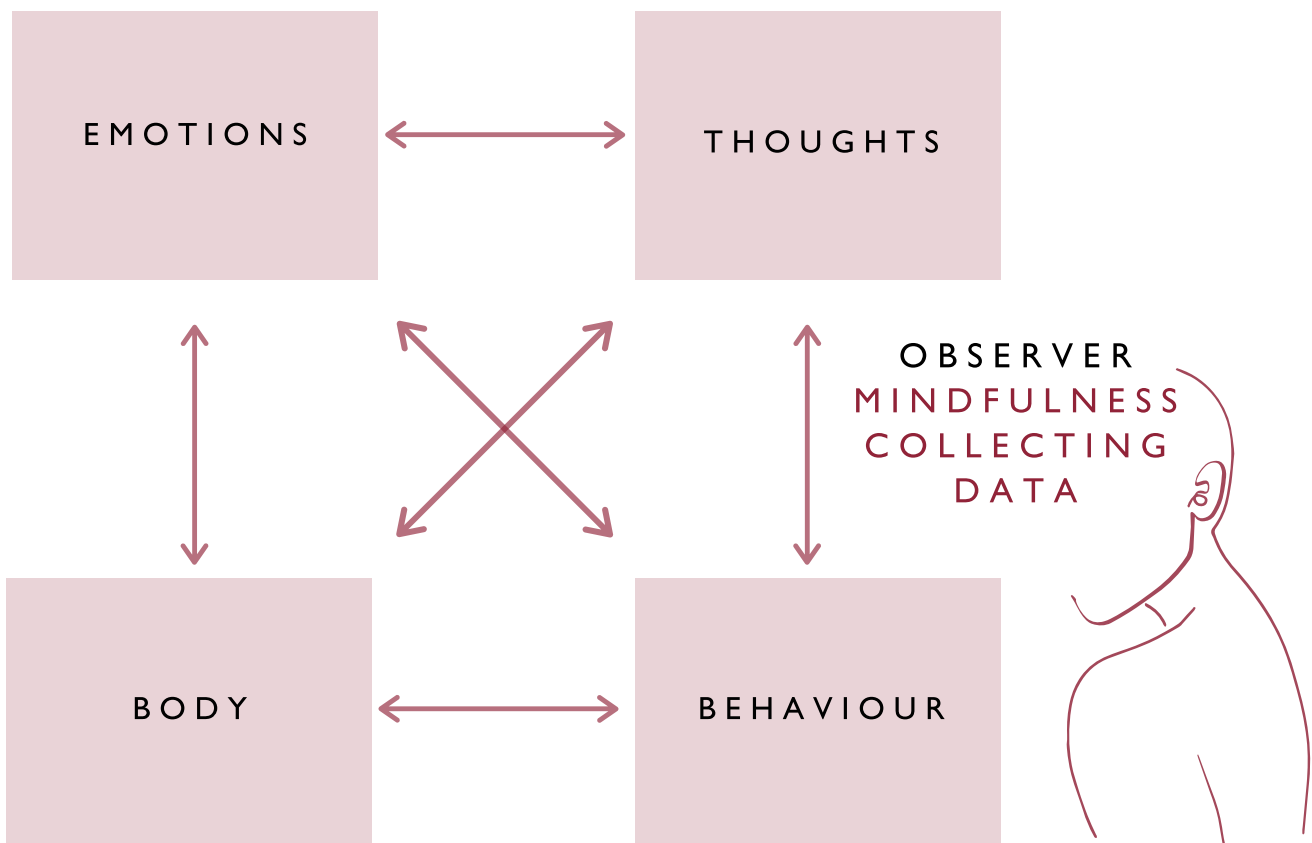
Ways of developing mindfulness and self-compassion include formal and informal meditation practice, compassion cultivation trainings and therapies like Mindful Self-Compassion, Compassion Cultivation Training, and Compassion Focused Therapy. Even other mindfulness trainings like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction demonstrate compassion and self-compassion as secondary outcomes (Jazaieri, 2013).



# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP THE OBSERVER-SELF

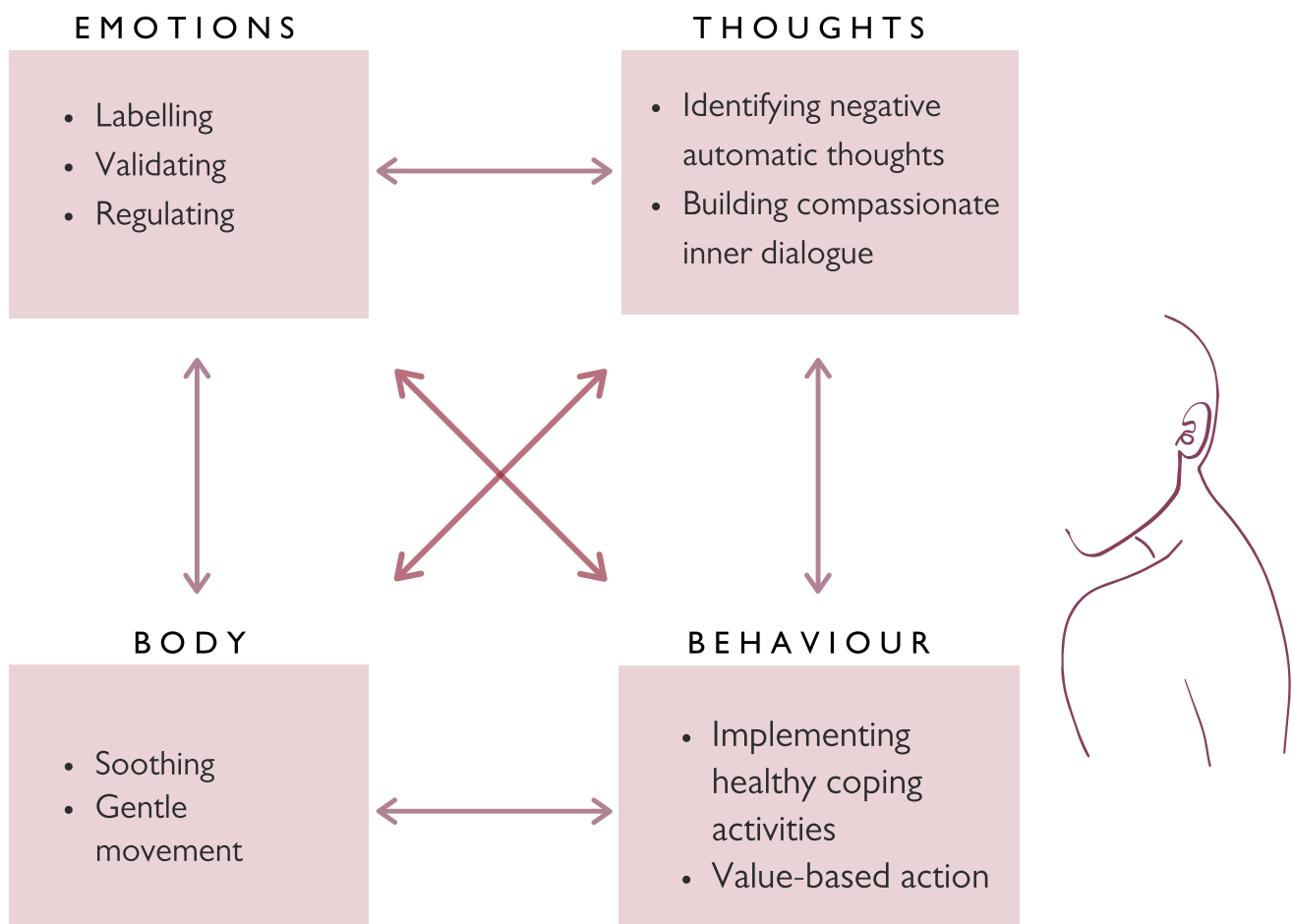
The observer-self is important as it gives us more space to respond to a situation, rather than reacting to it. Often times our reactions come from a place of fear rather than value-based action. You can develop the observer-self through informal and formal mindfulness meditation practices. Practicing the entire model by gathering data in the moment that you are struggling and filling out the squares — like we did in the previous chapters — will also help you develop the observer-self.



# Third Wave Cognitive Model

## STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP EACH PART

Another element of this model that can be really helpful for creating change is to break down specific strategies for each part of the model. Some of the strategies will be detailed in the following pages. Specific examples can be found on page 63.



A gentle reminder that this is an introduction and more information can be found in CBT models of therapy as well as third wave therapy approaches.

# Third Wave Cognitive Model

Below you will find examples of how you can use this model to support you.

What strategies have you already implemented and what can you implement in the future? Do you have other ideas?

## EMOTIONS

Noticing                      Validating  
Labelling                     Regulating  
Other:                         Accepting

## BODY

Relax shoulders  
Take deep breaths  
Practice soothing touch  
Other:

## NOTES

## THOUGHTS

"It makes sense that this is hard for me. I have been hurt in the past."  
"Being alone is more painful than the risk of getting hurt."  
"I am struggling and I am doing the best I can."  
"Although I feel awkward, others probably feel this way too."  
"I am a caring person. I can be a good friend."  
"It might be scary to make the first move but I can try."  
"It would help me to explore and try new things."  
Other:

## BEHAVIOUR

Initiating conversations  
Camera on for virtual events  
Connecting with peers during group work  
Generate/accepting invitations  
practicing talking with friendly and safe staff  
Exploring hobbies, gyms, or public event spaces  
Calling home  
Practicing creative arts  
Joining communities, clubs, leadership positions  
Engaging in mentorship or networking opportunities  
Building a social network early on (same and different culture)  
Other:



# Emotion Regulation

## OUR EVOLUTION HAS AN IMPACT

Dr. Paul Gilbert Ph.D., founder of Compassion Focused Therapy details research-based evolutionary neurobiological mechanisms that impact our current human experience. An important concept is the theory of "tripartite affect regulation." It suggests that we have evolved with three main biological drives that affect our brain and our emotional response (Gilbert, 2017).

### **Threat and Defence Drive**

This drive exists to help us survive attacks from threats and to overcome injuries. It activates the stress response, and the emotions of fear, anger, and disgust. This mechanism exists to protect us so that we can have the best chance of survival. It can be incredibly uncomfortable, yet it has a very important function!

### **Acquisition and Achievement Drive**

We are also biologically motivated towards supporting physical health and procreation by gathering goods. Just like the threat drive, this mechanism also linked to the stress response. When we achieve and acquire, we experience positive emotions like joy, competition, excitement and pleasure.

### **Soothing Drive**

We developed the capacity to regulate our emotions so that we can override the biological influence of threat on our nervous system, get rest, and create deep connections necessary for our survival. This mechanism is tied to social connection and community formation, as we are more likely to survive in nature, together. This last evolutionary mechanism is called rest and digest or the soothing drive. Emotional responses of this system include soothing, peacefulness, and calm.

# Emotion Regulation

## SOOTHING & BREAKING SHAME

Through soothing, we can deactivate the stress response and move into the experience of safety, rest, restoration, and compassion. This system is impacted by neurobiological and hormonal responses that are founded in the primary relationships with our caregivers (see Paul Gilbert's work on "The Compassionate Mind" or "Attachment Theory" for more). As a result, caring, compassion, and calming strategies can help you feel more at ease through intentionally activating the soothing drive. Biologically, activating this mechanism permits the deactivation of the threat and acquisition drives allowing for a more calm and empowered life (Gilbert, 2017).

When we experience trauma, it can be difficult and scary to begin to practice soothing, which can lead to activating the threat drive, perceiving calm as alarming and making us vulnerable. Processing our traumas with trusted connections or licensed practitioners can help us create an internal safe attachment to support our biological, physical, emotional, and social needs so that we can activate the soothing system for optimal health. Recent research is exploring how to overcome fears of compassion.

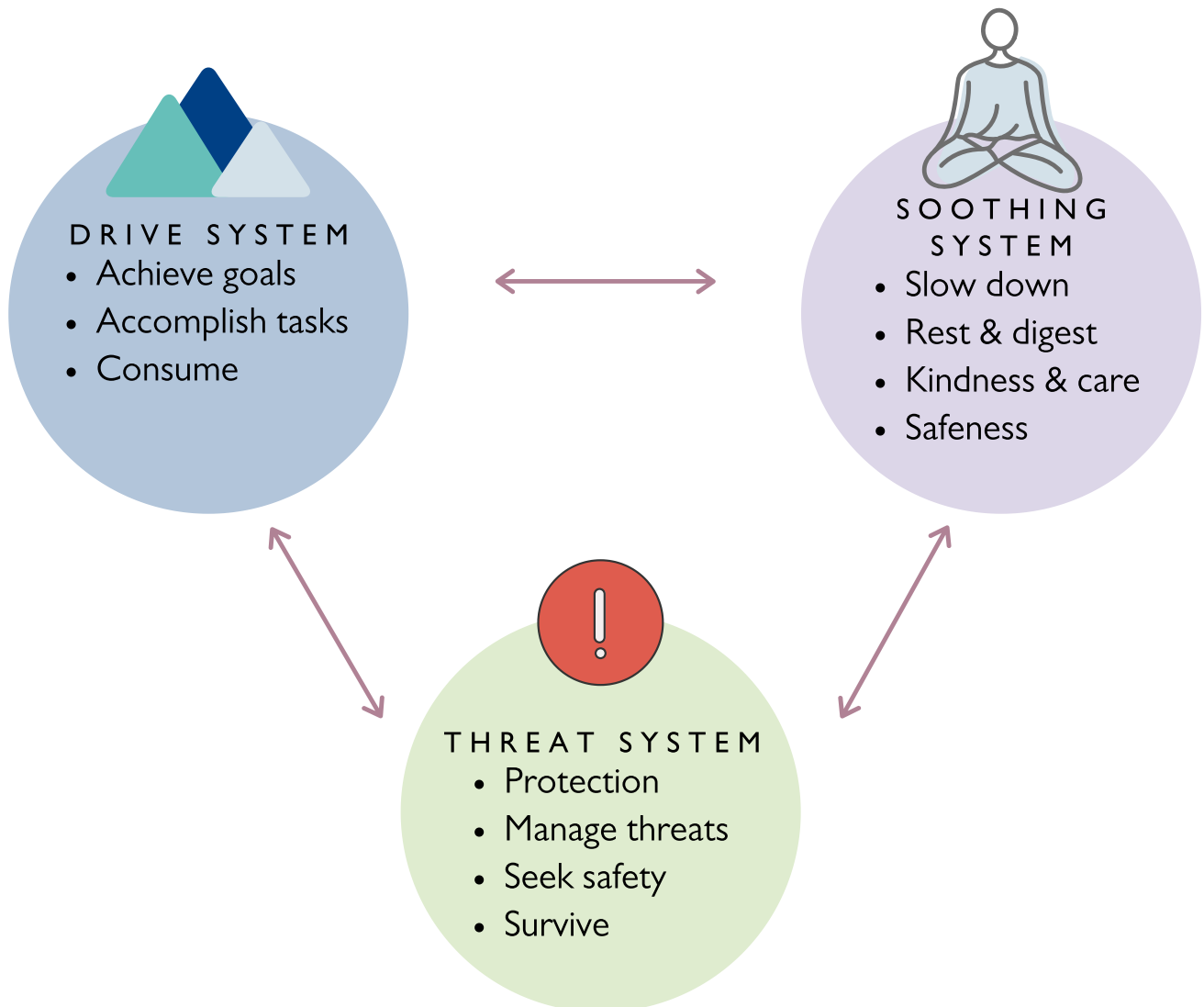
Although important for our survival, shame and guilt are not the most "helpful or most optimal strategies" as Paul Gilbert often states. Understanding their function can help relieve self-criticism and shame, thus leaving more space for a non-judgemental and caring approach to more optimal forms of engagement with our lives. Becoming more conscious, increasing your self-awareness regarding guilt and shame, and integrating compassion can help free us from our instinctual reactions and into a more empowered, intentional, and meaningful way of living.

# Emotion Regulation

## APPLYING THE MODEL

Below is a visual representation of Gilbert's (2017) model of emotion regulation. How does it relate to your experience of aloneness?

### The three circles of emotional regulation

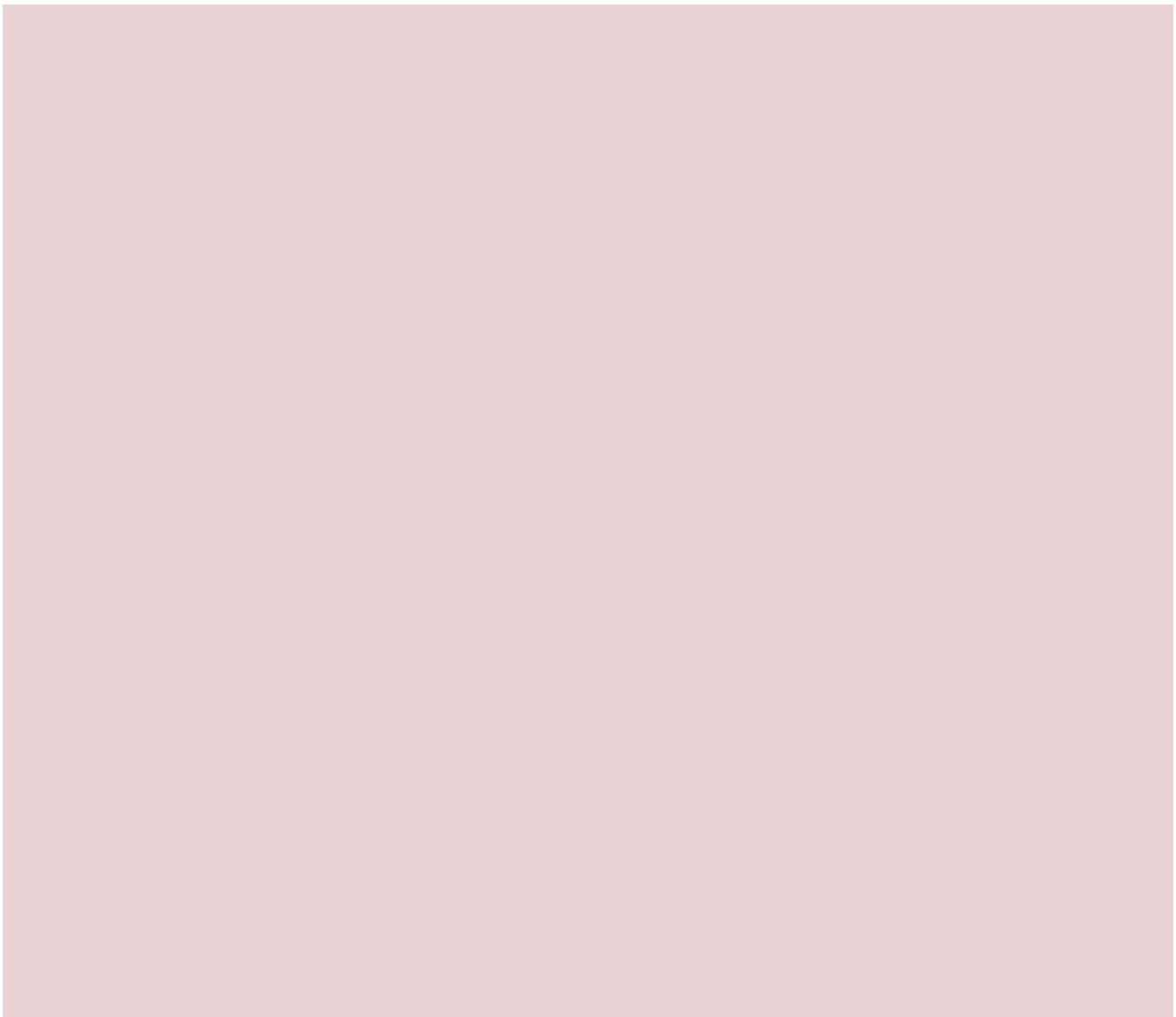


Adapted from Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges*. London: Constable and Robinson. Adapted from: The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (n.d.) Applying the 3 Circles Model of Emotion to Help Clients Heal Shame. <https://www.nicabm.com/3circles/>

# Emotion Regulation

## APPLYING THE MODEL II

How does the expressions of being alone impact your experience with the model of tripartite affect regulation described above? Take a moment to consider how all three circles show up in your life, then produce a visual representation of each of the circles based on how much space they take up in your life.



Adapted from Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges*. London: Constable and Robinson. Adapted from: The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (n.d.) *Applying the 3 Circles Model of Emotion to Help Clients Heal Shame*. <https://www.nicabm.com/3circles/>

# Emotion Regulation

## APPLYING THE MODEL III

What do you notice about the circles in your drawing? Are some circles bigger than the others? While we may not notice it, many of us spend most of our time in "threat" or "drive," which can explain why we often feel stressed.

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE IN YOUR DRAWING? WHAT DOES THE SIZE OF THE CIRCLES MEAN TO YOU? HOW DO THE CIRCLES CHANGE DEPENDING ON SOLITUDE OR LONELINESS??

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IF YOUR SOOTHING CIRCLE WAS SMALLER, WHAT SMALL CHANGE CAN YOU MAKE AS OF TODAY OR THIS WEEK TO INCREASE YOUR SOOTHING?

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Adapted from Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges*. London: Constable and Robinson. Adapted from: The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (n.d.) *Applying the 3 Circles Model of Emotion to Help Clients Heal Shame*. <https://www.nicabm.com/3circles/>

# Pets Make a Difference

## FINDINGS

A recent study explored the role of pet ownership and loneliness during lockdown in Australia (Olivia & Johnston, 2021). The study revealed that dog ownership had a positive influence on owners. More specifically, dog ownership reinforces a routine, increases time spent outside of the house, and provides more opportunities for socially distanced socializing. Although pet owners did report concern about their animals' wellness post-pandemic with the return to work, qualitative data from this study suggests that having an animal at home to communicate out loud with, to pet, cuddle, and play with helped decrease the experience of loneliness for individuals in the study. Although more research is needed, it appears that intentional time spent with the animal, having a responsibility, engaging in a routine, and nurturing an emotional connection with animals could be beneficial for individuals struggling with loneliness during the pandemic and for the future.

By no means are we suggesting that you need to adopt an animal to relieve loneliness. Adopting an animal into your life is a long-term commitment that requires work, dedication, and love. However, if you are ready for this type of connection, or if you already have a pet, connection and intentional presence with them can help alleviate feelings of loneliness.



# Your Relationship to Relationships

## FINDINGS

Often, a barrier to connection is a history of rejection or abandonment. These experiences can lead to two different outcomes: 1) engaging in hyper-vigilance when we are in relationships or 2) trying to overcome loneliness by building new relationships (Mund & Neyer, 2019). Often, we can get caught in a cycle of isolation in order to protect ourselves from the pain of connection, all the while experiencing deep suffering from being isolated from the world. In her book, "Loving Bravely: Twenty Lessons of Self-Discovery to Help You Get the Love You Want," Dr. Alexandra Solomon details the concept of our "relationship to relationships." She writes that our stories and experiences in relationships guide us into having a relationship to relationships themselves. Therefore, we have fears, expectations, dreams, stories, wishes, goals, and values in relationships that influence how we enter them.

HOW DO YOUR PAST RELATIONSHIPS AND YOUR PRESENT "RELATIONSHIP TO RELATIONSHIPS" AFFECT YOUR NEEDS, FEARS, AND EXPECTATIONS WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE THE EXPRESSIONS OF BEING ALONE?

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# Social Media Reflections

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND THE EXPRESSIONS I

You learned in chapter three that social media can have an impact on your expressions of being alone. Take some time to look at your usage and its effect on your life.

### WHAT IS MY SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PRACTICE?

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### WHEN DO I OPEN THE APPS?

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### HOW HAS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA USE CHANGED DURING THE TIMES OF COVID?

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# Social Media Reflections

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND THE EXPRESSIONS II

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR YOUR EXPERIENCES OF CONNECTION?

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WHICH APPS HELP ME FEEL MOST MEANINGFULLY CONNECTED? ARE THERE ANY THAT HURT ME?

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WHICH APPS WOULD I BE WILLING TO LET GO OF NOW TO HELP SUPPORT MY WELLNESS?

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# Social Media Reflections

## COLLECT YOUR OWN DATA

Over the next week notice what you were experiencing right before you decided to open social media. Each time before opening the application(s), take notes about your experience in the moments before you engage. Quickly jot down any emotions or thoughts you might be having. At the end of the week, notice if you see any trends. Does social media help how you feel connected? How can you continue to feel meaningful connections?

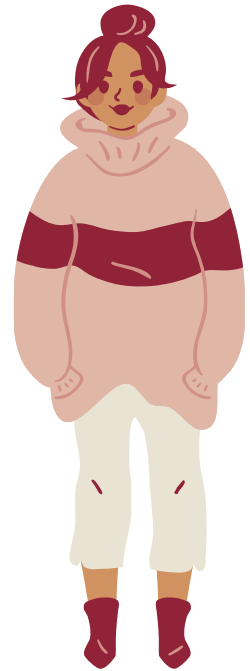


# Planning for Setbacks

WHAT FUTURE CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT TRIGGER YOUR FEELINGS OF LONELINESS?

## CONTEXTUAL

- Physical distancing due to Covid-19
- Relocation or moving
- Physical or mental health issues
- Financial difficulties or debt
- Other:



## CULTURAL

- Immigrant status or international student
- Language barrier
- Cultural differences, culture shock, or acculturation stress
- Microaggressions and racism
- Diverging from cultural norms of birth culture
- Resolving multicultural identities
- Generational gap
- Other:

# Planning for Setbacks

WHAT FUTURE CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT TRIGGER YOUR FEELINGS OF LONELINESS?

## ACADEMIC/CAREER

- Excessive workload
- Academic difficulties
- Adapting to new requirements or expectations
- First-year university/job
- Changing schools/workplaces, adapting to new academic/work cultures
- Other:

## SOCIAL

- Friend or romantic breakup
- Feeling misunderstood or hurt
- New friendships or surface-level friendships
- Physical or emotional distance from family
- Other family issues
- Grieving
- Other:

# Planning for Setbacks

## TYPES OF LONELINESS I MIGHT EXPERIENCE

It is highly possible that you will experience loneliness in the future. Which categories might be most difficult for you? How come?

### INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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### PEERS/COLLEAUGES

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### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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### FRIENDSHIPS

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### CULTURAL CONTEXTS

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# Know Your Strategies

## IN YOUR INNER CIRCLE

Now that you know more about how all levels of your connections impact your life, you can begin to look at the areas that are doing well and the ones that are struggling. In the boxes below, start by identifying what is going well in each category and then note strategies to nurture the connection or build more. Ask yourself what concrete steps you can take for each to increase connection.

### WHAT IS GOING WELL?

### STRATEGIES

#### INTIMATE



1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### FAMILY



1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### FRIENDSHIPS



1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Know Your Strategies

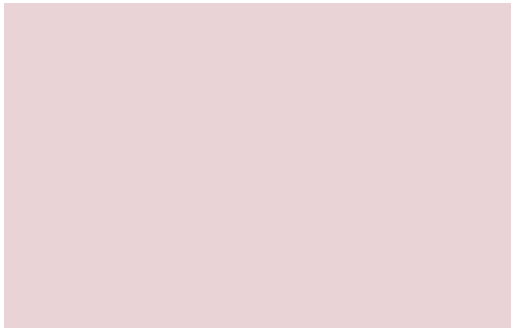
## IN YOUR OUTER CIRCLE

In the boxes below, continue to identify what is going well in each category and then note strategies to nurture the connection or build more. Ask yourself what concrete steps you can take to increase connections in each area.

### WHAT IS GOING WELL?

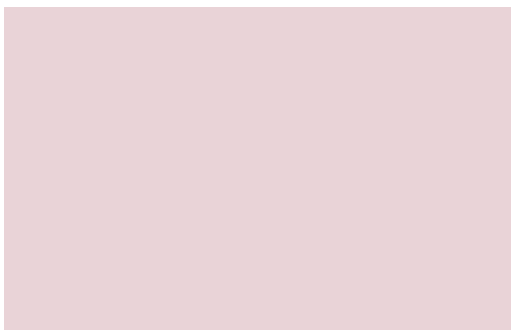
### STRATEGIES

#### WORK/COLLEAGUES



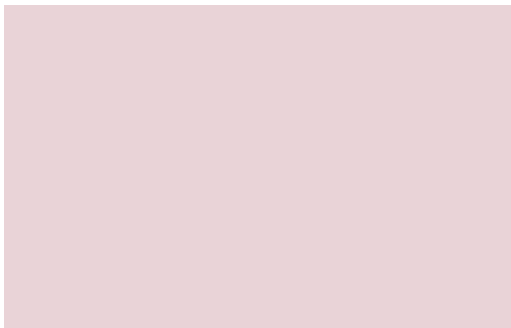
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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#### COMMUNITY



1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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#### CULTURAL



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# Summary

## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH LONELINESS

Personal resilience, positive coping behaviours, and increasing perceived social support can help you cope with loneliness (Labrague et al, 2020). Using mindfulness to develop the observer-self and gain insight into how your thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and body are interrelated can help you break free of automatic patterns. Breaking these patterns can help you practice compassion towards yourself and others, and align your actions with your values. We are wired for social connection, resting, seeking resources, and avoiding threats. These systems evolved to protect us and ensure our survival. By moving into a more compassionate mindset, we can have more power to act rather than react based on our biology.

Your connection with animals, your relationship to relationships, and your experience with social media can impact your experience of being alone. Thus, knowing yourself and planning for setbacks can be helpful for the future.







# Chapter V

SUPPORT, RESOURCES, AND CONCLUSION

# Ideas for Meeting Others

## AND RECEIVING SUPPORT

### PERSONAL

- Family
- Relatives
- Partners
- Friends
- Mentors
- Coaches



### IN THE COMMUNITY

- Staff or personnel at activities
- Events
- Religious communities
- Hobbies & classes
- Meet up activities & apps
- Helplines
- 811, family doctor, CLSC

### AT CONCORDIA

- Peers & colleagues
- Professors
- Staff
- Mentorship Programs
- Tutoring
- Volunteering
- Student Services
- Student clubs and associations
- Peer Wellness Ambassadors
- Zen Dens
- Residence Life
- Attending workshops
- Holding leadership roles

# More Resources

SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE RELATED CONTENT

## TO READ



- [Braving the Wilderness: True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone](#) by Brene Brown
- [Together: The Healing Power of Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World](#) by Vivek H. Murthy

## TO VISIT



- [Loneliness](#)
  - [Emotional Isolation](#)
  - [COVID-19](#)
- [Self-Compassion: Dr. Kristin Neff](#)
- [Friendships: Dr. Miriam Kirmayer](#)

## TO WATCH



- [Loneliness: In a nutshell](#)
- [The Anatomy of Trust: Dr. Brene Brown](#)
- [The Power of Vulnerability: Dr. Brene Brown](#)

# In Conclusion

## WHAT TO REMEMBER

The expressions of being alone move on a continuum between loneliness and solitude. Your emotional experience and appraisal of being alone will influence where you find yourself on the continuum. Normalizing that loneliness impacts many individuals, even if they don't show it, can help you build a more compassionate mindset.

Positive solitude is necessary for identity development, decision making, and feeling freedom. It might be intimidating at first to embrace spending time alone, thus openness, curiosity, patience, and engaging in solo activities that bring you peace can support you when beginning to explore solitude.

Loneliness has detrimental effects on your mind, body, and emotional state. It is incredibly prevalent across cultures and has dramatically increased in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. We may isolate ourselves as a protection mechanism to avoid getting hurt because we feel misunderstood or not seen by those around us, or because we are invited to practice social distancing measures. You may have other reasons that lead you to experience loneliness, and knowing why you might experience loneliness, how it affects you, and what strategies support your coping can help you move into a more connected life.



# In Conclusion

## WHAT TO REMEMBER II

The practice of identifying a situation and specifying your thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and cues from your body is a helpful way to embrace solitude, cope with loneliness, and overcome negative patterns in your life. This also helps you build resilience, compassion, and courage to change these patterns into those that have a more helpful and optimal impact on your life. Remembering that being connected to others is a survival mechanism that has deep biological and evolutionary roots can help break feelings of shame from wanting to be connected to others, and from the feelings that come with potential or actual rejection.

Knowing yourself, planning for setbacks, and practicing coping strategies can help you in the present and in the future. You will grow and evolve as you continue to practice what you learned in this workbook and as you reconnect with your life.



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# About the Authors

AND GIVING THANKS



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**Debora Beatriz Rabinovich**

Dr. Jade-Isis Lefebvre and Debora Beatriz Rabinovich are psychologists at Concordia University.

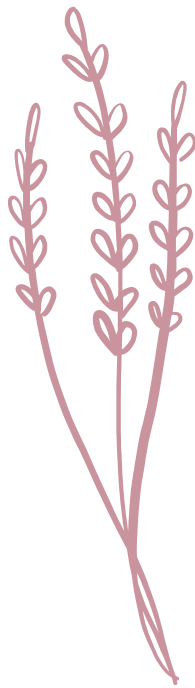
In their role at Concordia, they meet with students individually, innovate wellness programming, create content, offer workshops, and deliver wellness initiatives.

Since May 2020, they have been co-facilitating a workshop called the Expressions of Being Alone for the student population of Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. This workbook was created as a stand-alone resource and to support their workshop.

A special thank you to Maya Youngs-Zaleski for your precious editing and collaboration. Thank you to the Concordia team and to our students who continuously inspire us as they grow.

# The End

THANK YOU!



IF YOU HAVE ANY FEEDBACK, PLEASE CONTACT US!  
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