



**WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Health & Safety Directorate

# HOW TO OVERCOME FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

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# SESSION GUIDELINES

- Please mute your microphone
- If you wish to maintain anonymity, please:
  - change your name to “Anonymous” in the settings
  - turn off your camera
- Make sure to unmute yourself to ask a question
- You can also ask your questions via the “chat” function – we will try our best to answer them and/or provide resources.
- We will make relevant information such as resources pertinent to this topic available on our webpage.

# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LONELINESS?

Universal phenomenon – common to all humans

Loneliness is a shared human experience

– an undesired and hurtful emotion that most people will experience at some point in their lives

Loneliness is likely to affect all of us at some point in our lives – complex and multifaceted experience – always very painful, severely distressing and individualistic.

# DEFINITION

- A subjective unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship
- Mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

Loneliness is a PERSONAL EXPERIENCE that can mean different things to different people

- Varies across different people under many conditions, with a multitude of causes, consequences and impacts



# DESCRIBING LONELINESS:

- Loneliness is PAINFUL - words used to describe it include hurt, sorrow, ache, sadness, depression,
- Loneliness can be described as FEELING A LACK OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS (whether a person is living in isolation or not)
- Loneliness can be a TRANSIENT FEELING that comes and goes
- It can be SITUATIONAL – occurring at certain times like Sunday, holiday or Christmas
- Loneliness can be CHRONIC – someone feels lonely all or most of the time
- Loneliness can be characterized by its intensity or how strongly it is felt which can change from moment to moment and over different durations of time



# LONELINESS vs ISOLATION vs SOLITUDE

- Loneliness is often used interchangeably with isolation –linked and can often overlap
- Isolation is observable
- It is possible to be isolated without feeling lonely and to feel lonely while surrounded by people
- Being alone could be painful – a time of utter despair but it may serve as a time for writing, mediation, reflection, imagining, reviewing your life and making decisions about the future.
- Loneliness is not the same as solitude – as solitude is something which some people enjoy – stopping the hectic pace of life while loneliness is an welcome feeling.



# CAUSES OF LONELINESS

- Loneliness fluctuates over the life course, with different causes and needs at different ages
- Decline in contact or change in relationships
- About person's identity and sense of belonging - whether they feel their social network is normal for their life stage
- Causes will vary from person to person – what about an experience that makes us feel lonely.
- Common themes:
- Previous experiences and conditions – trigger events
- Factors are specific to individuals e.g. personality or level of resilience at a particular time

# UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS

*(adapted from  
Peplau and Perlman  
1982,1998)*

Underlying factors – shape our expectations and need for relationships vs. our actual relations

- Social cultural influences
- Identity and personality
- Situation

Events or life stages trigger – change the balance btwn the relationships we have and those we would like

- Losing a loved one
- Moving to a new town
- Losing a job

Personal thoughts and feelings – shape how we see situations and the intensity of these feelings

- Is it something to do with me, or is it external?
- Is it within my control?
- Is it likely to last?





# EFFECTS OF LONELINESS


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- Feeling lonely is thought to affect us through three mechanisms
- Psychological pathways - people who report feeling frequently lonely report depression systems, linked to anxiety and feel unhappy in general increased risk for cardio vascular disease
- Biologically – people who feel lonely do not sleep so well
- Behavioral pathway – feeling lonely not exercising as much and smoking more than others who have stronger social connection



# HOW TO OVERCOME FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

Loneliness is likely to affect all of us at some point in our lives - not only distressing and implicated in physical and mental health problems

- Whether you are living in isolation or not, feeling a lack of social connectedness can be painful
- Loneliness occurs because of a change in circumstances - adapt and the feeling of loneliness fades; others are less able to shake off their pain.
- Loneliness is something that we can see positively – welcoming it as a sign that there is a problem with our relationships



# LONELINESS IS A RESPONSE TO THE NEED TO BELONG

To form and maintain strong, stable, interpersonal relationships.

- To be close and connected to one another
- Survival more likely for people in groups

Interpersonal relationships give us emotional health. We can:

- Share our problems/issues
- Laugh and have a good time
- Learn and know more about ourselves and others



# STATEMENTS ABOUT LONELINESS

1. I know the difference between aloneness and loneliness
2. I do not feel lonely very often vs I feel lonely all the time
3. When I think about it, I just don't have enough high quality friendships in my life.
4. I am a very shy person, I have problems communicating and sharing with others
5. Not only am I lonely, I am also very depressed or angry about the things around me
6. I am lonely because I do not have that close special someone in my life

# LONELINESS IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING ALONE

Aloneness is the objective state of having no one around or being by oneself for long periods

To be lonely is to suffer feelings of loneliness, to want people, social contact, and not be able to get any

**It is possible to be lonely without being alone and alone without being lonely**

- Lots of social contact or in a relationship or part of a family but feel lonely if you do not feel understood or cared for
- Virtues of being alone – hermits, monks and religious people treasure time alone for contemplation and communion with Higher Powers

I DON'T FEEL  
LONELY VERY  
OFTEN VS. I  
FEEL LONELY  
ALL THE TIME

We can think of loneliness as being experienced on a continuum with two extremes

- Experiences loneliness all the time – **trait loneliness.**
  - Loneliness is generated from the person – circumstances can aggravate your experience of loneliness
- Rarely experiences loneliness - when they do experience loneliness we call this type of loneliness **state loneliness.**
  - Loneliness is generated more by the environment than by the person or by the circumstances you are in and usually do not last very long (a day, a week)

# I JUST DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH HIGH QUALITY FRIENDSHIPS IN MY LIFE

Our need to connect is innate – but many of us frequently feel alone.

Loneliness is that state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one's desire for social connection and actual experiences of it

Loneliness can be tied to the quality of one's relationships - a lack of authenticity

Looking for new friends

Active solitude – engage in active behavior like writing or reading or directing your energies to something positive or creative

# SHYNESS AND LONELINESS

Shyness and loneliness have a very strong relationship to each others.

Two major obstacles to overcome:

- Mental - you believe that if you go and talk to people they will reject you.
- Behavioral problems – you may lack simple conversational skills to make new friends

People generally tend to reject lonely people because they act lonely – making an effort to make friends by breaking this cycle



# NOT ONLY LONELY BUT DEPRESSED OR ANGRY

Constant feelings of loneliness that are very painful as well as feelings of anger or depression – past experiences

- May result from hurt, lack of love or attention, abuse or neglect often associated with abusive parents or caregivers – childhood trauma
- A sign of a more deep seated psychological problem that needs to be resolved – severe type of loneliness

I AM LONELY  
BECAUSE I DO  
NOT HAVE THAT  
CLOSE SPECIAL  
SOMEONE IN  
MY LIFE

People who lack primary relationships – close relationship one has with another - tend to be very lonely

Loneliness of emotional isolation or separation distress


- Loneliness comes when there is a loss or absence of an attachment figure - someone who gives us a sense of security or reassurance.

Online dating industry and in poems – imagining having someone there - romanticizing a knight in shining armor coming to rescue us from loneliness or having a perfect lover or friends



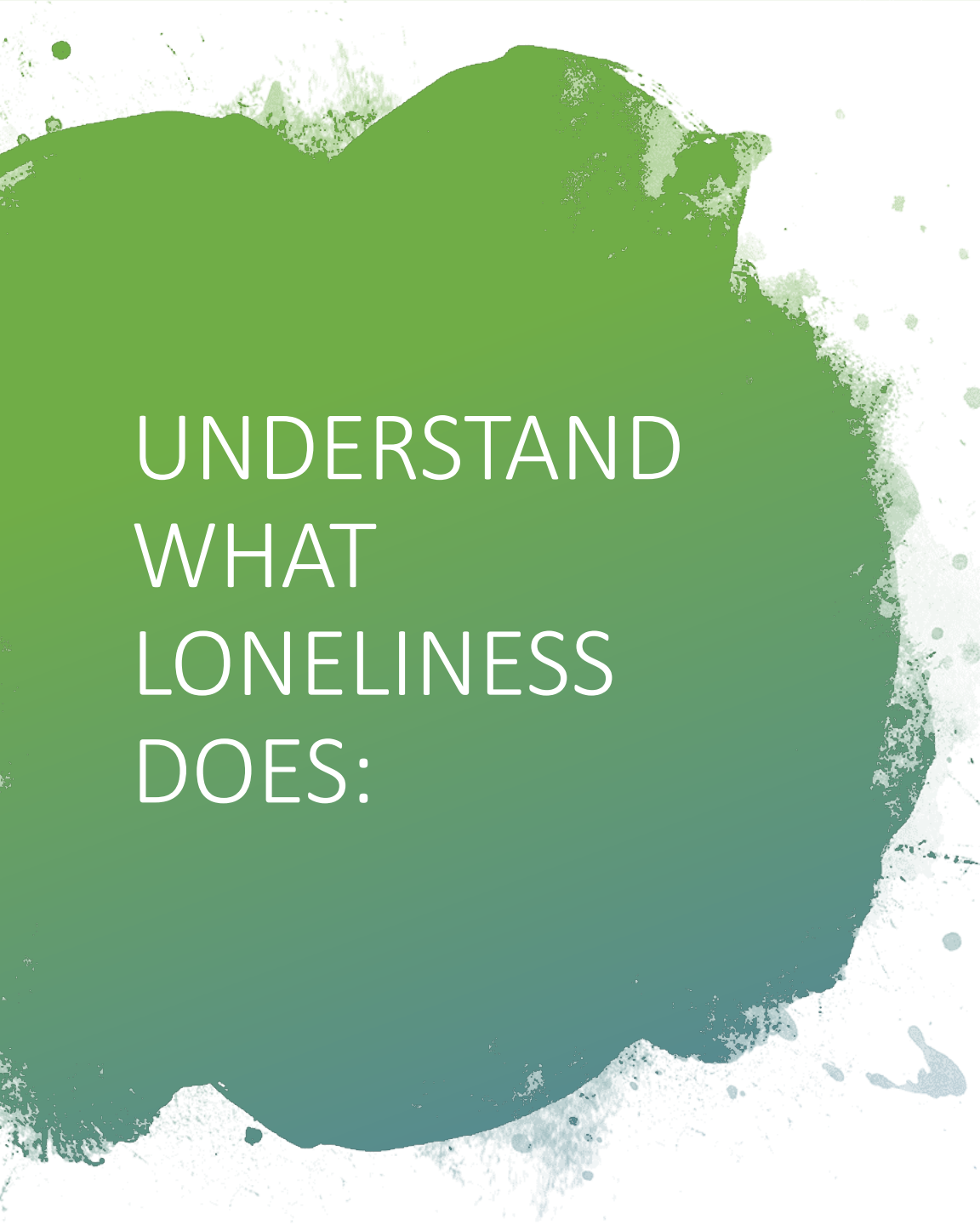
# OVERCOMING FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

- Loneliness affects millions of people - key is realizing how you feel and finding the best strategy for you
- Accept that not everyone is going to agree with us – varying viewpoints and different expectations
- Actively contact people – there might be rejection because of past experiences but still be willing to reach out
- Being of service to others - when we work towards a goal that would benefit the community, we mentally connect and identify with others



# ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND ACT

- A first step to overcoming loneliness is realizing how you feel and the negative impact it is having on your life.
- Try talking to a counselor or therapist- help you work through factors that may be contributing to it and help you build coping skills
- Talk to friends and family – let them know you are struggling with loneliness and how they might be able to help you feel less lonely
- Loneliness is often stigmatized – more likely to deny feeling lonely which increases feelings of loneliness – leads to further isolation



# UNDERSTAND WHAT LONELINESS DOES:

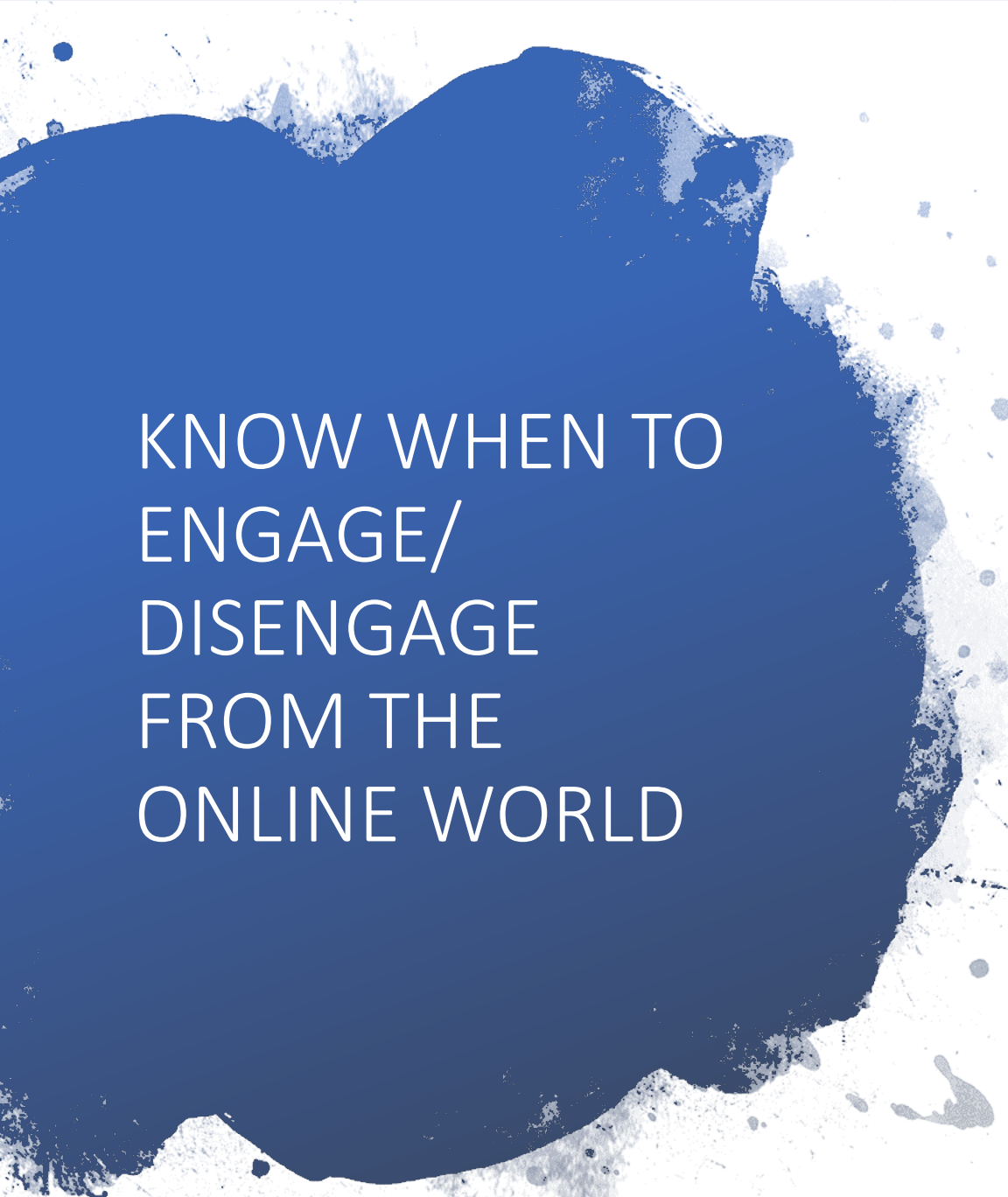
To you brain, body and to your behavior

- Dangerous to feel isolated – our brain snaps into self-preservation mode
- Feeling lonely is linked to early deaths- health impact similar to obesity or smoking
- Impacts how our immune system functions, damage sleep quality and put us at risk of heart disease
- Unwanted and unknown effects on our thoughts and actions towards others



# RESPOND BY FORMING AND STRENGTHING CONNECTIONS

- Promote intimate connections - one individual who is trusted, in whom you can confide and who can confide in you
- Promote relational connectedness - sharing good times with friends and family
- Collective connectedness - volunteering from something that you enjoy



# KNOW WHEN TO ENGAGE/ DISENGAGE FROM THE ONLINE WORLD

- Double-edged sword – log on or log off – which is healthier? It all depends
- Non-threatening and convenient ways to connect, interact and engage with others that is satisfying for some people
- Social media is often highlighted as a cause of loneliness among young people - some people feel inadequate, left out and feeling lonely. It may be a sign that you need to log off.
- The way we live and work - technology allows us to work more flexibly but also limits opportunities for interaction



FIND A  
VOLUNTEER  
OPPORTUNITY AS  
A WAY TO FEEL  
LESS LONELY

- Volunteering involves contributing your time and energy and working alongside others for a good cause
- Effectively helps you in fighting loneliness by bringing a sense of happiness and fulfillment
- Ease stress, reduce feelings of depression, can help you make friends and connect with others





A PET MAY HELP

JOIN A GROUP  
OR CLUB

- Reduce the risk of premature death among people who live on their own.
- Caring for a pet provides an opportunity to meet new people
- Groups and clubs are founded on common interests and hobbies
- Meetup is an online platform, all types of interests to give you things to do when you feel lonely, make friends and get together with likeminded people



# PRACTICE SELF-CARE

- Exercise – triggers endorphins in the brain that elevate mood and make you simply feel better
- Sunshine – triggers good hormones including endorphins and serotonin which have positive benefits
- A healthy diet – can affect your brain health – focus on eating whole foods and prevent the negative impacts of sugar, preservatives and highly processed foods on your physical and emotional health
- Sleep quality is closely tied to emotional health – try practicing better sleep habits as loss of sleep or poor sleep habits can aggravate feelings of loneliness and isolation and vice versa

REWRITE THE STORY  
*Loneliness can be  
conquered only by  
those who can bear  
solitude. Theologian  
Paul Tillich*

- Try turning your loneliness into solitude and use it to your advantage
- Opportunity for ME time –and get to know yourself better
- Destress – become aware of your fear, wishes and needs
- Develop new or old skills
- Acceptance and reflection turn the negative impact of loneliness into a more positive one
- Mindfulness meditation – may reduce the subjective feeling of loneliness by reducing maladaptive cognitive functions

HSD-Sponsored Wellness  
Program

Available to all WBG Staff  
Personalized Health Risk  
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Relax App  
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**connect**   
with your  
**Health**  
COUNSELING



# Domestic Abuse Prevention Program

- Specialized and confidential counseling and case management services to prevent the escalation of domestic abuse
- Emphasis on early intervention and assistance for individuals who may already be impacted by an abusive relationship
- Prompt referrals to specialized services to assure safety and security
- Coordinated access to the Bank Group's and IMF's information (e.g., HR) relevant to individual situations; and to other internal resources as necessary (e.g., Staff Association, Internal Justice System, Health Services, Security)
- Ongoing, relevant, and prevention-oriented educational outreach via seminars, printed materials, and internet resources



## Domestic Abuse Prevention Program

# Family Consultation Service

- Sponsored and funded by World Bank Family Network
- Confidential, no-cost counseling, consultation, coaching and referrals for spouses, domestic partners, and other dependents over the age of 18 years old
- Emphasis on providing support to families so that they may deal effectively with the stresses that can be associated with relocations and transitions; personal, marital and family concerns; life adjustments; and general stress issues
- Multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and experienced counselors
- 24-hour, seven-days-a-week hotline for crisis situations
- Individuals in country office locations can access service via Skype and phone counseling



WORLD BANK  
**FAMILY NETWORK**