

A Simple Solution for Loneliness

“Are you lonesome tonight?” Elvis Presley asked that question in 1960 in one his most famous songs. Today, unfortunately, the answer for many Americans is “yes.”

Modern loneliness is often described as an “[epidemic](#).” That specific term may be a bit [over the top](#). But it’s undeniable that loneliness is a big problem in our society.

According to a study by [Cigna](#), nearly half of Americans sometimes or even always feel alone. We often associate loneliness with the elderly. But Generation Z (adults 18-22 years old) actually reports the highest levels of loneliness.

This is a problem for many reasons. A growing body of [research](#) indicates loneliness may be worse for your health than obesity or heavy smoking. In his book *12 Rules for Life*, psychologist Jordan Peterson explains why human beings need to have conversations with each other to preserve our mental health. “People organize their brains with conversation. If they don’t have anyone to tell their story to, they lose their minds. Like hoarders, they cannot unclutter themselves.”

Modern loneliness is a complex problem, and the solutions will also vary. But here’s a really good way to get started: we should admit to other people that we are lonely.

I recently had an eye-opening experience about this when I met a woman whom I’ll call “Jane.” This Jane subsequently invited me to a social event where I met her mother. We were having a nice chat when her mother suddenly said to me, “You seem like a nice girl. Couldn’t you be friends with my daughter? She is very lonely. She has no one here.”

I was so astonished it took me several seconds to respond.

Jane was a charming, outgoing person. She appeared to host a lot of social events at her home. I liked her a lot. However, I hadn't done much to pursue contact because I assumed she already had a million friends. I expressed as much to her mother who said, "Yes, well, she puts on a brave front."

So that very evening I invited Jane to meet for coffee. We've been getting together regularly since then. To borrow the famous quote from *Casablanca*, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

But why did it take Jane's meddling mother for that to happen? Is loneliness one of the last taboos in our society? Somewhere deep inside all of us, there's that high school student who is terrified of being the "loser" who has no one to sit with at lunch.

One big obstacle is the fear that others will perceive us as needy or clingy. Those traits might drive potential friends away. But then sometimes we overcompensate by making it look like we have a busier social life than we really do.

It's entirely possible to admit your loneliness to another person without being clingy. You are in good company. Half of America feels the same way. If nothing else, you should at least try to avoid putting forward a false image. People have to know you're available to hang out. That's the first step towards them becoming your friends.

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