

Light Paper

Combating the Epidemic of Loneliness in The United States: Creating More Connected Communities



June
2024

Stories

Ree, age 12: I'm sitting with some of my friends and that day everyone is talking about the latest gossip of a girl getting together with a boy. I tried to ask a question about them, as I really didn't know what was going on. Everyone laughs and is like "oh it's nothing." They go back to talking and a couple minutes later, a girl says "Why are you so smart Ree? You can't hang with us if you are. Too bad you have no idea what's going on. Clearly you aren't as smart as everyone says". That was like a punch in the stomach. I've always been the "smart kid", but I didn't realize it had put me so far apart. Now, no matter who I try to talk to, I know that there'll always be that loneliness in me, because I had yet to find another soul who understood me.

Emily, age 23: After college, I moved to a different state for work, where I had literally no family or friends prior to moving. I had such high hopes of making a fresh start for myself and finally meeting my squad, that "Friends"-esque type family that you build for yourself and aren't born into. Well, finding that is easier said than done, but I felt that I had found that with my coworkers. We're all around the same age and enjoy spending time with one another. However, as time goes on, I've found that we're drifting apart and don't really

connect the same way we used to. We used to all go to lunch together and would round everyone up so we could all eat together in the break room. Recently though, I looked up from my computer and realized that I was all alone in the office. It was 11:30 a.m., and everyone had gone to lunch without me, and never told me that they were leaving. I felt so abandoned and isolated, that it triggered my loneliness again and I've been struggling to cope since. I've found that being left out of group conversations, jokes, etc. is a big trigger for me, and so even though this incident was small, it felt so deliberate, that I've been wondering why my "squad" has decided that I'm not important enough to them to include on a regular basis anymore. What did I do wrong? Why don't I warrant their interaction, companionship, and camaraderie? Thankfully, I have a wonderful best friend that lives in the same city as I do now, and my family (my parents in particular) are the people I'm closest to in the world, so I know that I can pick up the phone, day or night, and talk to the people who love me more than anything else in the world. I'm so incredibly grateful for this, but I long to have the "squad goals" that everyone else my age seems to have. Then that leads to feeling guilty for not being appreciative enough of the people that I do have in my life, causing a vicious cycle of loneliness, guilt and despair.

Anonymous, age 52: Later in life I wound up in a leadership role with more than forty employees and several direct reports at the company where I worked. It was a high-profile position that involved public speaking, television appearances, attending galas, and meeting upon meeting. I was inundated with people coming and going from my office. I had a narcissistic boss who was emotionally abusive. I realized that I was the buffer for all these wonderfully talented people, but I couldn't really talk about how difficult the experience was for me with anyone at the office. When things became really challenging, I would take long walks, stay in the washroom for longer periods of time, or I would get sick and stay home from work. Even though I had this highly public job, I was utterly lonely.

Summary

This Light Paper will summarize the US Surgeon General's extensive report on the "Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation" in the US. After the synopsis, we will distinguish between the often interchangeably used phrases "being alone" and "loneliness." Following this key differentiation, we will analyze some of the possible reasons the US is struggling with loneliness and social isolation and provide additional recommendations to create a more connected society.

The stories at the beginning of this paper are atypical of our Light Paper format of sharing a singular narrative. Instead, this variety of voices and perspectives offer a nuanced portrayal of the loneliness epidemic in the US, enriching our understanding of the issue. These stories are quoted from [**The Loneliness Project**](#), a passion project created by Marissa Korda to create an archive of stories of loneliness. Korda generated this digital space to develop a community through real people sharing their experiences around loneliness.¹

As you can see, the stories are from people of all ages. Loneliness affects are widespread,

and this is a multifaceted issue which prompts researchers to capture many narratives to understand the full scope of the epidemic. These stories shed light on the many different faces of the loneliness epidemic.

Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, the 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the US, established isolation, and loneliness as a significant public health concern, emphasizing the necessity for social connection and community nationwide. We will cover the growing “Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation” consuming the US. An individual’s mental and social well-being are crucial for leading a healthy and fulfilling life, which in turn contributes to the resilience of families. If an individual is struggling with their well-being, it can impede their ability to effectively participate in their family dynamics.

This Light Paper issue will summarize the Surgeon General’s report while discussing other relevant data and make the critical distinction between “being alone” versus “loneliness.” This paper also will discuss circumstances that have contributed to loneliness in the US. In the recommendations section, see strategies to increase social satisfaction across communities to support happy and healthy living, such as:

- To address loneliness effectively, the United States can draw inspiration from innovative approaches implemented in other countries.
- Like other nations cultivating “anchors of connection”² through rituals, communities can explore similar strategies to foster bonds.
- Encouraging education on the importance of connection in institutional settings can raise awareness and equip individuals with the skills needed to cultivate meaningful relationships from an early age.

US Surgeon General’s Report Summary

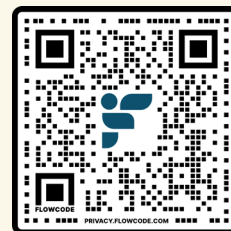
Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy and his advisory released an **extensive report** in May 2023 highlighting the devastating effects of loneliness and isolation, going as far as to say that there is an epidemic in the US concerning these issues. The call to action emphasizes that the US Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation affects people of all backgrounds, including adolescents, adults, and older persons.

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The report shines a spotlight on some critical data that accentuates how detrimental loneliness and social isolation can be to our overall mental, physical, and emotional health. Some of the highlighted statistics include:

- Compared to those who used social media for less than 30 minutes per day, people who reported using social media for more than two hours a day were twice as likely to report feeling socially isolated.³
- A multitude of longitudinal studies have shown that poor social relationships are associated with heart disease and stroke, increasing the risk of premature death by 26% to 29%.⁴
- An increased risk of developing dementia is associated with chronic loneliness.⁵
- Children who experience loneliness and social isolation are more likely to develop mental health disorders like depression and anxiety.⁶
- Chronic loneliness is as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.⁷

The paper also mentions how addiction is a profound consequence of loneliness and isolation. As discussed in the [Addiction Light Paper](#), studies show that loneliness can be a contributing factor to addiction because individuals use substances to numb the pain and give them a false sense of security.⁸ A study done in 2022 found perceived support and emotional intimacy were predictive factors for excessive alcohol use.⁹ All this contributes to the conclusion that there is an increased need for results-driven solutions that aid everyone in overcoming feelings of loneliness and breaking social isolation barriers. Recent news articles have emphasized the severe state of loneliness in the US. The Survey Center for American Life reported 15% of men report having no close friendships, which is five times higher than the rate in 1990.¹⁰ In a broad sense, as compared to 33% of US adults in 1990, only 13% of US adults say they have ten or more close friends today.¹¹ Almost fifty percent of US individuals are at least somewhat dissatisfied with the number of friends they have. Additionally, people of all ages, social groups, ethnicities, and racial groups experience loneliness. The Cigna US Loneliness Index found there are generational implications of the epidemic, with 73% of Gen Z individuals (people born 1997-2012) feeling either sometimes or always lonely.¹² This statistic is up 69% from just a year ago. Another age group that is disproportionately affected by loneliness is those in their mid-40's or Gen X (people born 1965-1980), with those in their 60's or Baby Boomers (people born 1946-1964) experiencing the lowest rates of loneliness.¹³ This data demonstrates how the Epidemic of Loneliness is consuming the US.

Dr. Murthy and his team have developed an action plan with an extensive list of recommendations to increase connections between people and community to combat the current rate of disconnection. The National Strategy to Advance Social Connection recommendations take a multi-level approach, using the six pillars to advance social connection. The six pillars are:

Loneliness in the US: A Study

This Light Paper on the Epidemic of Loneliness was inspired by the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory 2023 study on loneliness in the US. It highlights the public health crisis of loneliness and lack of connection. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately half of US adults reported measurable levels of loneliness, impacting our holistic health.

This report emphasizes the need to prioritize building social connections and community relationships.

“However, they are also less likely to stop smoking if they are in close connection to others who smoke ...it is clear that it is not just the presence of social connection and social support but the nature of the behaviors and norms in one’s social network that influence health-related behaviors.”

Learn more about this report by scanning the QR code or visit:
www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf



1. **Strengthen social infrastructure in local communities**
2. **Enact pro-connection public policies**
3. **Mobilize the health sector**
4. **Reform digital environments**
5. **Deepen individual knowledge**
6. **Build a culture of connection**

Through the six pillars, the report grapples with solutions within national, state, and local governments, those within schools and the educational system, community-based organizations, media and entertainment industries, parents and caregivers, and at the individual level. The call for collective action from all levels of society demonstrates the severity of the issue and why we all need to pay closer attention to how we can build connected communities to improve health outcomes.

To take a look at the US Surgeon General's report, visit this [link](#) to access the full copy. The table of contents starts on page 2 and can guide you to the section you are most intrigued about exploring further. In the following sections, this paper will focus on some key takeaways, explore the journey that has led us to this point, and provide innovative strategies to alleviate our country's Epidemic of Loneliness and isolation.

Being Alone versus Loneliness

Many people might interchange the term “being alone” with “being lonely”; however, Dr. Carla Perissinotoo, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, is one of many professionals who states that while there is a relationship between the two, it is not strong enough to claim that the two are the same.¹⁴

Being alone is a physical state of being.¹⁵ There is nothing wrong with needing time to be by yourself in your own company. Introverts often like being alone to recharge their social battery and feel ready to take on the world.¹⁶ The need for time in solitude does not mean introverts are anti-social, but rather that their social batteries may

drain faster than their extroverted counterparts. Additionally, being alone can have benefits for everyone. When someone is alone, they have space to think about their feelings, ideas, hopes, problems, and experiences, giving time to process things that someone may not be able to when in others company.¹⁷ Science has given evidence to support that solitude can increase empathy by giving you time to think through situations to build compassion, spark creativity, and build mental strength.¹⁸ Studies have also shown that being in a space alone can increase productivity by enhancing concentration because you are less distracted by outside people and stimuli.¹⁹ Alone time looks different for everyone. For some, it may be reading a book or drawing; for others, it may be playing video games, hiking in a new location, or learning a new skill.

On the other hand, loneliness is an emotional state where a person feels disconnected from other individuals; they feel isolated even in a room full of people.²⁰ When it comes to loneliness, it is about the quality of relationships versus the quantity; someone could have hundreds of friends and still feel like there is no one around them to lean on and listen to them. In her book *Atlas of the Heart*, Brené Brown, a renowned professor and author, describes loneliness as the absence of meaningful social interaction, whether with close friends, intimate partners, community, or work groups.²¹ Everyone can feel lonely sometimes; however, chronic feelings of loneliness, as indicated in the Surgeon General's Report, can harm one's well-being.

John Cacioppo, the Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, described loneliness by the following sentiment in his [TEDx talk](#):

"To grow into adulthood for a social species, including humans, is not to become autonomous and solitary; it's to become the one on whom others can depend. Whether we know it or not, our brain and biology have been shaped to favor this outcome."²²

He continues this discussion by saying that our brain has adapted to favor specific ways, feelings, and behaviors. Thirst and hunger are aversive systems that trigger an action to aid our survival; when you are hungry, you eat and hydrate when you are thirsty. He argues that the pain and aversiveness of loneliness are part of a biological warning system that warns us to protect our social body. The action to alleviate loneliness is to find a connection. So, why are we denying ourselves an essential need like connection?

Why is this happening?

When researchers approach an issue, one of the first questions that comes to mind is: "Why is this the way it is?." Regarding the Epidemic of Loneliness in the US, there is no singular answer as to why or how we got here. Some of the most frequently discussed contributors are smartphones/technology usage and the COVID-19 pandemic. With the rise of technology, many individuals are more likely to reach for their smartphone than to start a conversation with someone nearby. Specifically, social media platforms like Instagram,

Facebook, and Snapchat impact feelings of loneliness negatively.²³ Americans spend at least six hours a day on digital platforms.²⁴ A University of Arizona study showed that smartphone dependence predicted a higher rate of loneliness and depression in young adults.²⁵ Dr. Elias Aboujaoude, a Stanford University psychiatrist, explained how the countless connections on social media might be “happening at the expense of more rooted, genuinely supportive and truly close relationships.”²⁶ Technology creates a facade of connection, making individuals think there is no need for outside communication.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected loneliness rates in the US. Ample research indicates the forcing of individuals into social isolation had lasting impacts on feelings of loneliness.²⁷ Quarantining and social distancing, while necessary, led to many individuals feeling disconnected from each other and was particularly harmful to those with pre-existing mental illnesses.²⁸ During this period, people did not have opportunities to develop social skills through in-person interactions. A Baylor College of Medicine professor, Dr. Eric Storch, explained face-to-face interactions are a cornerstone for creating connections. He said, “It allows someone to practice who they are and get pretty immediate feedback. That helps us learn how to effectively navigate the world and interpersonal relationships.”²⁹ Everyone, especially children in a period of crucial social development, missed out on the ability to grow and form relationships. In the post-pandemic US, we are still seeing the effects through drastically lower personal contacts; many people tightened their groups after the pandemic and cut down on the time spent with them.³⁰

While many might think smartphones and the COVID-19 pandemic are to blame for the current state of loneliness, we must recognize the trend of a lonelier society started before these entities existed. While the widespread use of cellular devices and the isolation of the pandemic contributed to the problem, they are not the sole reason.³¹ The YouTube documentary “[**How We Became the Loneliest Generation**](#)” points to the 1960s and 1970s as the pinnacle turning point in the US history from a society of connection to a society that has never been so disconnected.³² The documentary



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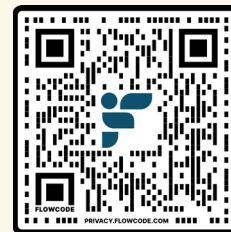
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explains how the 1960s marked a societal shift from focusing on the collective community to changing the nation's status quo. Then, the 1970s marked what some call the “Me Decade” or the “self-indulgent ‘70s”. During this time, many individuals focused on themselves; this time was marked by self-reflection and rule breaking.³³ While these titles have a negative connotation, the big takeaway from this time was the focus on hyper-individualization, or a tendency for a person to act in a self-centered manner. The responsibility to each other dissolved as the age of individualism birthed. In fact, from the 1960s to the present day, holiday letters saw a dramatic increase in references to families having “crazy schedules.”³⁴

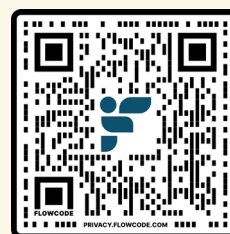
Today, society continues to revolve around an obligation to oneself through individualistic values. While there is nothing wrong with focusing on individual needs, a narrow perspective can isolate someone from support systems because we become determined to do things on our own. Along these lines, being busy has become the new normal, with “time poverty” at an all-time high as people work to jam-pack their schedules.³⁵ In the age of busyness, being busy has become morally admirable. Research by Silvia Bellezza, a Columbia marketing professor, shows that people perceive busyness as a status symbol, with the word being synonymous with significant and impressive.³⁶ Along these lines, Americans are working longer hours and traveling more for work, which increases the difficulty of developing and keeping meaningful friendships.³⁷ The busyness culture in the US has ramifications on loneliness because often, people are committed to career pursuits and advancing themselves in society, making little time and energy for relationship building. It is essential to remember that *busyness does not equate to fulfillment, with most of the time filled with “getting ahead” rather than connection and joy.*

Another reason the US may have gotten to where we are with the widespread effects of loneliness is the lack of third spaces. A third space is a term originating from sociologist Ray Oldenburg³⁸, describing a place where someone can regularly connect with others, known or unknown, over a shared interest or activity; they are spaces where conversation should be facilitated with people outside your work and family sphere.³⁹ A third place differs from your first place, which refers to where you live, and your second space, which refers to where you work or go to school.⁴⁰ A third place may be a community center, coffee shop, church, local park, or restaurant. Third spaces have declined over the past few years, leaving people needing a spot to encourage conversations and friendships outside of technology. Psychologists have found third spaces are “our social hubs” and are closely tied to social



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well-being, showing how to build better-connected communities and reduce loneliness.⁴¹

These are some researched reasons for how the US has gotten to the point where loneliness has consumed the lives of many. The rise of technology usage, specifically pertaining to social media, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the societal shift to valuing busyness and individual needs, and the lack of third spaces, are all contributing to the United States' loneliness crisis. The silver lining, however, is that while there are many angles to look at why this issue has grown roots in our society, there are also many anecdotes for the problem.

Next Steps

While the eighty-plus page report includes an extensive outline of possible solutions to the plight of loneliness in the US, the Institute for Family has researched additional solutions to aid our society in becoming more connected for individuals and families to flourish. These recommendations can be explored below:

1. **Look to other countries for innovative ideas that are proven to remedy loneliness.** By studying and adopting proven methods from Japan, Denmark, and the United Kingdom and modifying the interventions to the US' unique cultural and societal context, we can gather valuable insights and approaches to promote a more connected country. While the US has abundant knowledge and thoughtful ideas, other countries have seen similar trends of loneliness and have implemented successful strategies to combat this issue. Cross-cultural learning can amplify the effectiveness of the fight against loneliness.

For starters, we can learn through Japan's Moais. A moai is a social support group that provides varying types of support, whether it be social, financial, health, or spiritual. Okinawa, Japan is considered a blue zone, a geographic area that is known for lower rates of chronic diseases and marked by longer life expectancies.⁴² These social groups start in childhood where a group of about five young children are paired together and extend into the life span of individuals, acting as a steady source of comfort and companionship. The United States should emphasize the importance of networks that span the lifetime by possibly adopting a version of this practice where kids who are preschool or kindergarten age are put into groups that mimic moais to begin to develop skills around having a network of individuals to lean on.

With a similar goal of developing community and togetherness, Denmark has adopted multigenerational living. Multigenerational living communities are places specifically designed to incorporate populations of all age groups so they can interact and establish a community.⁴³ They are shown to decrease depression and loneliness, especially for those in older populations.⁴⁴ Groups in Denmark have intentionally created intergenerational communities to develop mutually beneficial social ties between aging populations and younger counterparts.⁴⁵ The **House of Generations** in Aarhus, Denmark, is a prime example of the power behind this practice. The House of Generations is an experiment working to bring



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together elderly homes, nursing homes, youth housing, family homes, and daycare institutions to form a place where good relationships between people are encouraged and celebrated.⁴⁶ This affordable housing strategy aims to provide low-cost homes for families, students, aging individuals, and disabled people while encouraging individuals to participate actively in the neighborhood.⁴⁷ The manager, Kristian Dall, said, "It is a modern version of a traditional village where everybody knows each other."⁴⁸ While the US has some examples of intergenerational cohabitation, deliberate development of these housing environments, especially in areas where populations are at most significant risk, would be incredibly beneficial to fostering community cohesion.

In the United Kingdom, they have leaned towards the broader strategy of centralizing data to create a place where citizens can see where loneliness is most prevalent and who is at the most significant risk of becoming lonely. **Age UK** worked with the Office of National Statistics to develop heat maps to identify people at increased risk of loneliness.⁴⁹ The map focuses explicitly on elderly populations in the UK and looks at four predictors for loneliness: marital status, self-reported health status, age, and household size.⁵⁰ While the US has an abundance of rich data on loneliness, there are only a few locations where individuals can easily access this information. The US should consider taking a page from the United Kingdom's book and crafting a data hub around loneliness where people can use key data points to identify vulnerable populations, stay up to date with trends in loneliness, ensure resources are being allocated appropriately, and remain current with the development of effective interventions.

No one country has accomplished the complete eradication of loneliness. However, countries like those discussed have documented strategies that have significantly aided the issue. The US can learn from these interventions to adequately address the diverse needs of people around the nation during the Epidemic of Loneliness.

2. Create spaces and opportunities for individuals and families to create "anchors of connection" through ritual. This may include finding a "third place." In a TEDx

Talk, **Baya Voce** speaks to the public health crisis, which can be alleviated by what she refers to as “anchors of connection.”⁵¹ Voce speaks to how she got the inspiration for this recommendation from **Blue Zones**. Blue Zones are regions worldwide where inhabitants reportedly live longer, healthier, and happier lives.⁵² A vital component of these countries, as Voce found, is that they focus on their relationships. Anchors are created with people who see, hear, and value you. She says the most powerful way to create these connections is through ritual. Like any other ritual, anchors of connection are developed through repeated action and intention. Voce’s ritual is getting together with her friends every Monday night in one of their houses. On good days, they serve as a space to celebrate small and big wins together, and through tough times, this ritual is a time they can lean on each other.

You don’t have to create something entirely new; it can be something you already do that you pick to do more intentionally and consistently. For example, dinner time at your favorite restaurant could become an anchor of connection. Pick one night a week where you purposefully set aside time with either friends or family to discuss what is going on in your lives without outside obligations and distractions. Another way to create these anchors of connection can be establishing a third place. Think about one of the United State’s most well-known shows, Friends. The members used Central Perk coffee shop in the show as their third space. Here, they created the ritual of coming together on good and bad days to have a moment together to discuss and ground them. Thomas Kramer, a professor of marketing at UC Riverside’s School of Business, builds on this idea by speaking about how those who experience chronic loneliness often feel like their lives lack meaning;⁵³ however, these rituals promote meaning and give structure to their lives.

Overall, research recommends when identifying anchors of connection, look to the who, what, where, and when:⁵⁴

- Who makes you feel safe and welcome when you are around them?
- What actions or everyday moments nourish connection in your life?
- Where do you feel like there are spaces and environments in your life which give you a sense of contentment?
- When would be a good time for you to convene with your anchors?

3. The US should encourage communities to teach children about connection, build awareness and provide tools to help individuals create and maintain meaningful relationships. Ample research and the Surgeon General’s report taught us how chronic loneliness is as detrimental to a person’s health as smoking and obesity. The topics of smoking and obesity are integrated consistently into K-12 education in health classes across the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have even published guidelines for school health programs to prevent tobacco use and possible addiction.⁵⁵ If we know that loneliness is equally detrimental to one’s health, we should instills kids with skills and teach them to take control of their emotional and social well-being just as much as their physical well-being.

The Institute for Family team proposes educational institutions across the US incorporate a K-12 curriculum focusing on fostering healthy friendships, positive connections, and empathy. Scholars have found it essential to reach children early during the developmental stage to help them acquire the social skills to communicate, cooperate, and solve problems. Schools are a perfect place to cultivate this practice.⁵⁶

Everyday Speech is an organization created in response to the lack of resources for educators to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) into their teachings. Social-emotional learning is a research-proven strategy that assists young people and adults in developing and maintaining positive relationships and becoming lifelong learners.⁵⁷ The founders of Everyday Speech created a SEL Curriculum titled **Friendship Curriculum: Fostering Positive Connections and Empathy**. The evidence-based curriculum includes the importance of SEL, the role of friendship in SEL, building positive connections, developing empathy and understanding, enhancing communication skills, and resolving conflicts and problem-solving.⁵⁸ With this curriculum, Everyday Speech aims to take away lesson plan prep and stress from teachers by providing recommended books and literature, online programs and websites, and professional development opportunities.

Another organization which aims to give children and adolescents the social and life skills they need to become successful adults is the *Healthy Relationships* curriculum. The *Healthy Relationships* curriculum is shown to prepare students for personal and professional life after graduation, strengthen family relationships, become empowered to make plans, and communicate effectively with their natural support systems. This curriculum was created by Wesley Spectrum, a nonprofit provider of education, behavioral health, and autism services, and has a unique focus on specifically giving teens and adults with autism critical skills. It looks at topics like:

- Self-care & hygiene
- Social Skills
- Social media
- Friends vs. Acquittances
- Social rules and boundaries
- Consent
- Relationship development

Additionally, organizations like the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)** provide resources and give strategies for how to implement SEL in classrooms, schools, and communities to improve social and emotional well-being for everyone.⁵⁹ Just like schools teach about obesity and smoking, there can be dedicated time to talking about topics that will aid in creating more connected generations and equipping

kids and adolescents with skills that will help them avoid chronic loneliness.

All these curriculums integrate information and strategies to combat the Epidemic of Loneliness. The United States should prioritize teaching children about connection and relationship-building through the curriculums discussed here. Research, including the Surgeon General's report, has demonstrated how chronic loneliness can be as harmful to one's health as smoking and obesity, both of which are already addressed extensively in K-12 health education. Integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into school curricula equips children with the skills needed to foster meaningful relationships and maintain emotional well-being. Programs like Everyday Speech's "Friendship Curriculum" and "Healthy Relationships Curriculum" assist in embedding these teachings in our educational system, creating opportunities to cultivate more connected and empathetic generations, thereby reducing the prevalence of chronic loneliness and its associated health risks.

Conclusion

The Epidemic of Loneliness has existed for too long in the United States. Through taking research and data-driven steps, the US can create a culture of connection where people have the interpersonal skills to support their overall wellbeing and build strong and resilient communities. Brené Brown emphasized the importance of connection by saying, "Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." The Institute for Family team challenges you to do one thing today that can aid in your journey towards fulfillment to create a culture of connection:

- Find a third place and claim it.
- Create a ritual that you can return to in moments of struggle.
- Engage in a conversation with someone of a different age than yourself, or free up some conscious time in your schedule to meet a friend for dinner.

While the Epidemic of Loneliness will not dissipate overnight, conscious daily choices can contribute to more connected communities. As always, we can find humanity and empathy by sharing our stories to create awareness and establish more compassionate and supportive environments. If you have a story to share about your experiences with how loneliness has affected your life or approaches that allowed you to reach a happier and healthier state, the Institute for Family encourages you to share them through our partnership with StoryCorps Studios. Click [here](#) to learn more.

If you have any questions or comments about this Light Paper's content, please contact our Research Associate, Madeline Attianese, at mattianese@chsnc.org.

Resources

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