

# “Reach Out” To Reduce Loneliness

## 1. What is social isolation vs loneliness?

**Social isolation** is measurable based on the number of relationships that the individual is happy to have. Some people require few, others more.

**Loneliness** is a feeling of sadness or emptiness associated with not having meaningful interactions with others or sense of purpose in your life.

## 2. Who is at most risk of being socially isolated or feeling lonely?

**Living alone** does not cause loneliness if the person has people/ activities they feel connected to. Alternatively living with family, friends, or a spouse does not necessarily prevent someone from feeling lonely.

**Age (over 50 with low income) or changes** e.g. retirement, loss of spouse/family / friends, change of residence, health conditions (chronic disease, hearing, vision, limited mobility), care providers for older adults

**Women, Indigenous, Those who are discriminated against.**

## 3. Why is loneliness important?

**Growing rates** since the Pandemic in Canada 58% of all ages have reported being lonely. In ages 50-64 very lonely 23%, another 41% somewhat lonely (2023 study).

**Higher physical/mental health risks for those older than 50.** Stroke 32%, cancer death 25%, developing dementia 50%, death by any cause 45%.

## 4. How can you help?

**Reach Out** to get to know the person, be willing to go with them and walk alongside as they try new things, and be patient it takes time to make changes and build relationships.

**Individual Approaches** are needed so that they are meaningful to the individual, listen for their interests e.g. food events, spending time with friends/family (use technology) exercise (walking), time in nature, hobbies, volunteering, music, reading, etc.

**Spiritual Approaches** are not usually found in the literature but I believe it is at the heart of loneliness in the broader sense of purpose and meaning of life. As one responder in our parish consultation suggested we are uniquely prepared to provide spiritual supports in our communities. Inviting and accompanying others in all our parish activities including Alpha is a natural part of reaching out. Alpha is a way to connect people to think more about their spiritual self.

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### 5. When does “Reach Out” begin?

Now, right now! Even in 1995 Mother Theresa said this:

*“The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”*

Loneliness is not new but it is even more common now. The ask is to just **reach out**. Be with the lonely or socially isolated person whether in your family, your neighborhood, or your community. There is a great need and together we can make a difference.

Please write a note to the parish office describing your experience to help us learn how best to meet the needs of the lonely in our communities. Identify the note as loneliness but no names or identifying details are needed. Alternatively, if you prefer to talk about your experience let me know: Our Parish: 902-794-3951

### Some References:

“ [A Simple Path: Mother Teresa](#) 1995

“Aging Well” Queens University (Nov. 2020)

“Understanding Social Isolation & Loneliness Among Older Canadians and How to Address it “  
National Institute on Aging (2022).

“Understanding the Factors Driving the Epidemic of Social Isolation and Loneliness Among  
Older Canadians” National Institute on Aging (2023).

“Innovations to Address Social Isolation for Elderly Canadians at Home” (2023).

McMaster Optimal Aging Portal. Various articles e.g.

<https://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org/hitting-the-headlines/detail/hitting-the-headlines/2024/11/19/understanding-loneliness-and-social-isolation--a-guide-for-older-adults>