

# **LONELINESS**

## **Introduction**

As University students, we are all familiar with the experience of loneliness. Because each individual is unique, we all tend to feel lonely under different conditions. For example, some of us will feel lonely when we are excluded from group activities, others, when we are deprived of building close one-to-one relationships.

## **What is Loneliness?**

Loneliness does not necessarily mean being alone. For example, you can feel lonely when you are in a class with three hundred other students, in the middle of a party, or at a football game with hundreds of screaming spectators.

Loneliness is a painful awareness that you are not feeling connected to others and important needs are not being met. Loneliness means to feel:

- Excluded from a group
- Unloved by those around you
- Alienated from your surroundings
- There is no one with whom to share your personal concerns and experiences
- That you are alone and have no other choice. You find it difficult to make friends and go beyond mere acquaintance

## **Negative Effect of Loneliness**

If you are lonely you may find yourself engaging in the following behaviours that perpetuate the problem:

- You experience low self-esteem. You depend on your classmates and friends to build your self-esteem and to initiate activities, etc.
- You blame yourself and other students for your poor social relationships. You falsely assume that nobody likes you
- You do not make any attempt to get involved in social activities. You expect everyone that you admire to like and include you in their activities and conversations. If they do not include you in their social activities you may become more withdrawn, angry and isolated from other activities
- You become self-conscious and worry unnecessarily about being evaluated by your instructors, classmates and peers
- You have difficulty engaging in assertive behaviour. You are afraid to stand up for your rights and say "no" to unreasonable requests
- You avoid meeting people and new situations. You have difficulty introducing yourself, making telephone calls and participating in group activities

- You perceive yourself in a negative way. You become overly critical of your physical appearance
- You feel isolated, alone and unhappy about your situation

## **How to Overcome Loneliness and Regain a Positive Outlook**

Loneliness can be overcome. But it depends on **YOU**. Only you can build your self-esteem and learn to feel good about yourself. If you are lonely, do something about it:

- Seek out situations that enable you to get involved with other students. For example, ask someone in your class to be your study partner
- Learn to be assertive. If you are shy, learn to say hello or start a short conversation with the student who sits next to you in class, on the bus, etc. Get involved in class discussions
- Learn to enjoy life by developing your social skills. If you see someone that you like, don't just sit there and hope that the person will come to you. Make the first move. Use verbal and nonverbal cues to let the person know that you are interested in getting to know him/her. For example, make eye contact and smile. You can also go over, say "hi" and introduce yourself
- Get involved in organisations and activities on campus
- Do some volunteer work. Helping others will boost your self-esteem and make you feel good about yourself
- Don't judge people on the basis of your past experiences. Give your instructors, classmates and peers a chance, and try to get to know them. Remember! There are individual differences in people. Learn to admire and accept these differences
- When you are alone, use the time to enjoy yourself. For example, listen to music or watch a favourite television show. Do not spend the time eating endlessly or worrying about your problems

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