Be the Connection
The Older Adult Loneliness Project

Older Adult Behavioral Health Initiative

Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR OLDER ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

CLACKAMAS COUNTY

Multnomah County
Department of County Human Services

WASHINGTON COUNTY OREGON

Definitions

o **Loneliness**
- o Subjective feeling of being alone.
- o "The distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships." (Cacioppo. U. Chicago, 2009)

o **Social isolation**
- o Few, infrequent, or total lack of social contact
- o Objectively measured by the number of personal contacts that people have.
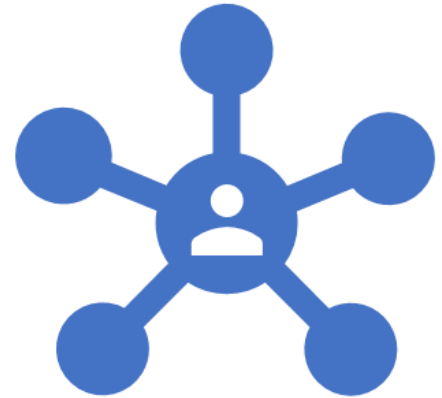
Social Isolation and loneliness are *both* associated with negative physical and mental health consequences.
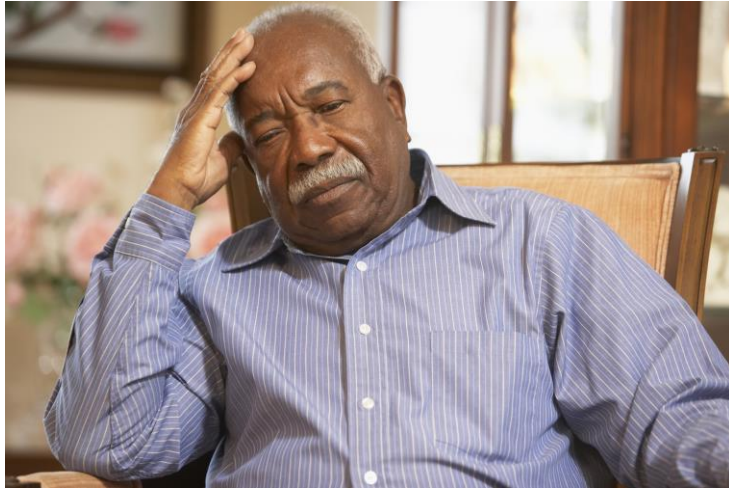
Prevalence of Loneliness in Older Adults

- 1 in 3 older adults say they lack companionship (National Poll on Health Aging, 2019)

- 46 million people in the US who are 65 and older = to nearly 20 million older people report feelings of loneliness.

- Approximately 28% people 65 and older live alone (Source 2017 Profile of Older Americans, ACL).
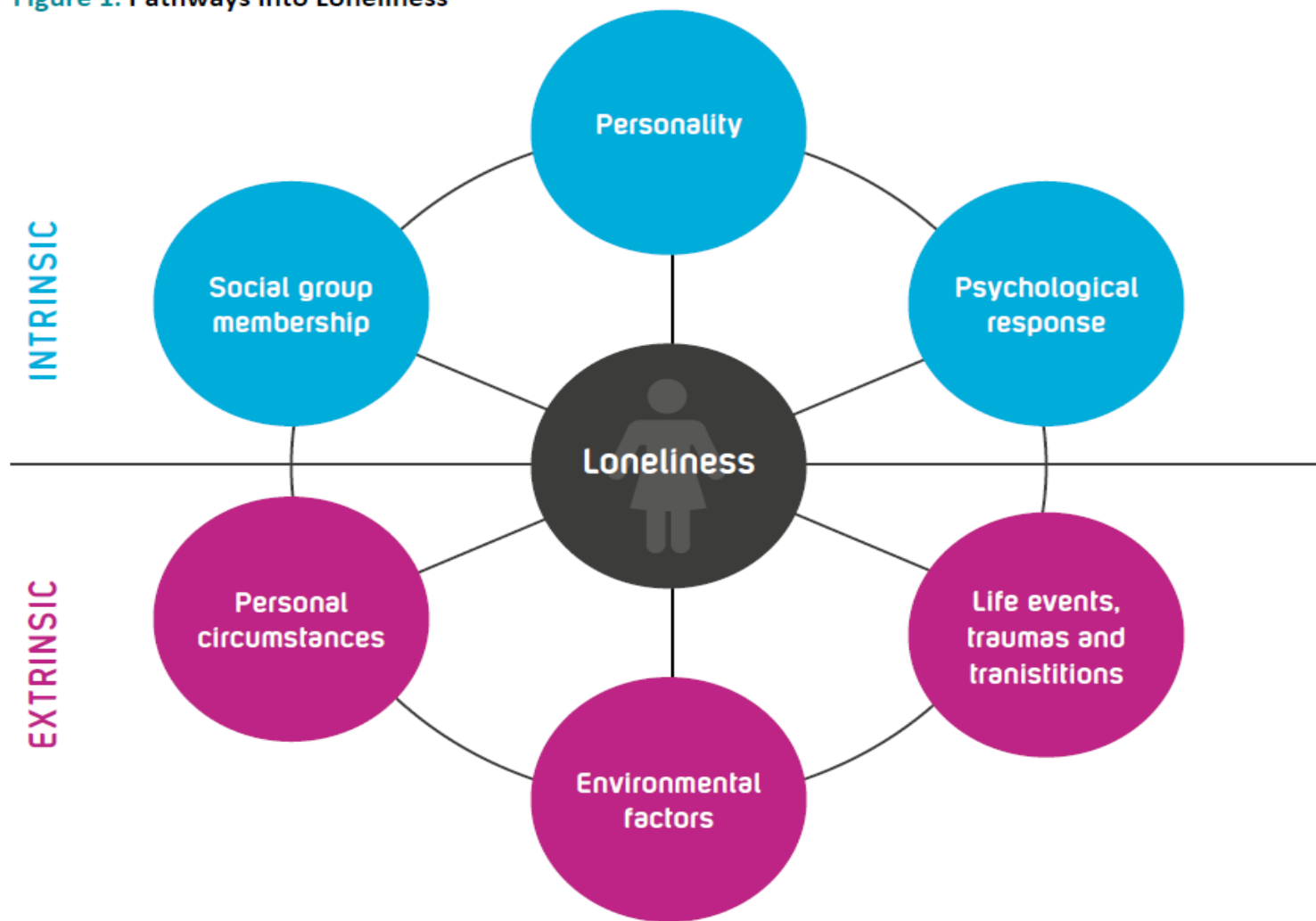
Trending towards loneliness

- Families are more mobile – more cross-country moves
- Non-traditional work: Remote/flexible schedules, gig economy
- Departure from civic engagement, social clubs, faith communities, unions
- Cultural Messages of "rugged individualism" and independence, autonomy
- Dependence on social media
- "Don't talk to strangers"

What older adults say about social isolation

Video: Campaign to End Loneliness

Figure 1: Pathways into Loneliness

INTRINSIC

EXTRINSIC

Personality

Social group membership

Psychological response

Personal circumstances

Life events, traumas and tranistitions

Loneliness

Environmental factors

LONELINESS

OLDER ADULT RISK FACTORS

Individual

Chronic Condition
Sensory Impairment
Limited Resources
Trauma
More likely to live alone
Increasing frailty
Loss of spouse/partner
Outliving friends
Loss of employment
Caregiver role

Community

Lack of employment
and volunteer opportunities

Stigma, ageism, discrimination

Lack of transportation options

Lack of age-friendly live-able
community

Ageism: Perpetuating the problem

- "Irrelevant"
- "Obsolete"
- "Useless"
- "A Burden"
- "Invisible"

Ageism Violates Human and Civil Rights

Health Risks of Loneliness

- Higher rates of cardiovascular disease & dementia
- Earlier morbidity, 26-45% higher risk of death (AARP, Connect to Affect Campaign)
- Increased problems with mobility
- Dependence in all areas due to increased risk for falls
- $6.7 Billion Dollars annual in health spending
- Higher risk of severe depression

Loneliness is not depression

- Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. It affects how one feels, thinks, and behaviors and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems, including difficulty completing daily tasks and feelings of worthlessness.

- However…loneliness *is* a major risk factor for depression.

~~75% of physicians were found to believe that depression in older persons is a "normal facet of old age".~~

Depression is **not** normal aging

Behavioral health risks: substance use gambling elder abuse misuse of Rx hoarding suicide

The Mental State of Suicide

Thwarted belongingness: Loneliness and/or absence of reciprocal caring

Perceived burdensomeness: View of oneself as defective and flawed to the point of being a liability to others

Joiner, 2005

"Loneliness and social isolation are literally killing us."
-    Dr. Vivek Murthy,
Former U.S. Surgeon General

Loneliness and Alzheimer's Disease

- Subjective feelings of loneliness may be a risk factor for developing Alzheimer's Disease

- Feelings of loneliness are linked to poor cognitive performance and quicker cognitive decline

- People who reported being socially isolated but *not* lonely were not at an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's disease or another dementia

Tjalling Jan Holwerda, Dorly J H Deeg, Aartjan T F Beekman, et al: Research paper: Feelings of loneliness, but not social isolation predict dementia onset: results from the Amsterdam Study of the Elderly (AMSTEL). *Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, 2012.*

Loneliness & Health Cycle

Loneliness is more dangerous to your health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day

(Holt-Lundstad, PLoS 2010)

Measuring loneliness

UCLA loneliness scale

- ☐ 1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- ☐ 2. How often do you feel left out?
- ☐ 3. How often do you feel isolated from others?*

Different tools, different interpretations

- ❑ GDS: "Do you prefer to stay at home, rather than going out and doing things?"

Online quiz: www.connect2affect.org

"The majority of the issues that our community is facing would be eliminated or drastically reduced if we could just figure out a way to become a community of great neighbors."

–Bob Frie, Mayor of Arvada, Colorado

1. Notice

2. Engage

3. Connect

Step 1: **Notice** Older Adults

- Notice older adults
- Look up
- Pay attention to situational cues, risk factors, high-risk groups

- Show up and be present in the community
- Ask yourself, "who's not here?"

Step 2: Engage

- Say, "hello"
- Smile and make eye contact
- Introduce yourself
- Use the person's name
- Give a compliment
- Sit next to someone
- Invite someone to join you
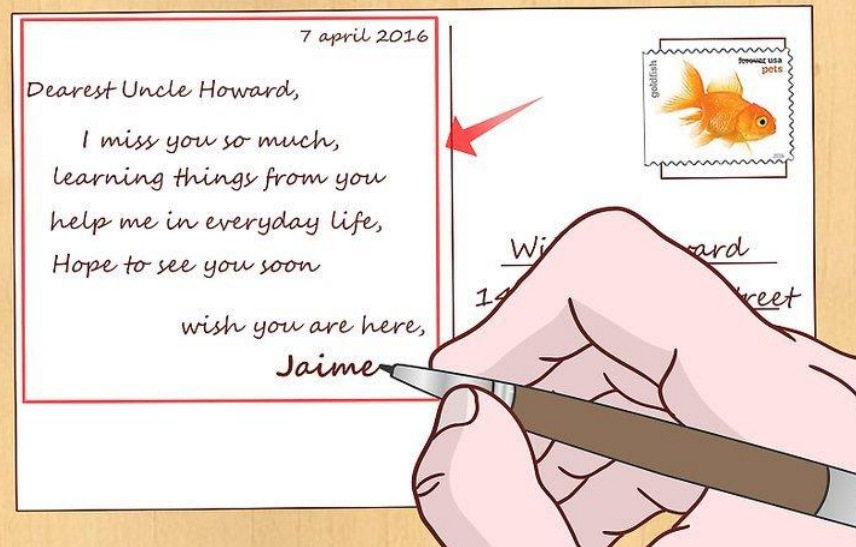- Meet up for coffee/tea
- Ask open-ended questions
- Make "small talk"

8 of 10 are hesitant to start a conversation

8 OF 10 ARE GLAD THEY DID

Take a moment to say "hello"

3. **Connect** to *community*

- Phone-based support programs
- Peer Support/visitor programs – Call your ADRC
- Senior, Active Adult, & Recreation Centers
- Arts & culture, museums
- Libraries

- Civic Engagement
- Volunteer opportunities
- Pets/Intergenerational activities
- Technology-based services
- Faith-based communities
- Classes, support groups

Phone-based support

- **Senior Loneliness Line:**

  503-200-1633

- **Oregon Senior Peer Outreach Line (Washington County, GOBHI) :** 1-833-736-4676

- **Aging & Disability Resource Connection:** 1-855-673-2372

Engagement-friendly communities

- Offer social engagement opportunities
- Work to address barriers to engagement
- Design spaces/events for social architecture
- Work towards becoming a welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and culturally sensitive community

Video: Start Seeing Seniors

Be the Connection!

- Connections are paramount to caring for people who are lonely
- Keep in contact with people you care about and help others keep in contact with people they care about
- Be as present as possible with people who are lonely

The end of loneliness starts with "hello"

Resources

- NIH Social Wellness Checklist – www.nih.gov/wellnesstoolkits

- EngAGED – National Resource for Engaging Older Adults - www.n4a.org/engaged

- UK's Campaign to End Loneliness - www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/

- AARP Connect2Affect – www.connect2affect.org

- *Local Resource – "Boomers on the Loose" by Janet Farr*

More trainings with the
Older Adult Behavioral Health Initiative (OABHI)

Hoarding Disorder

Anxiety and Depression in Older Adults

Elder Abuse

Trauma Informed Care

Suicide Prevention

Older Adult Mental Health First Aid

Dementia, Delirium and Depression

Project Visibility: LGBTQ+ Friendly Aging

Beautiful Questions Engagement Training

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