

LOOKING AFTER YOUR **HEALTH AND WELLBEING** WITH ARTICLES COURTESY OF **TOGETHERALL** IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **RESCUE BENEVOLENT FUND**



Are we all just kind of lonely?

HOW TO MANAGE FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION...

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In a time when we can instantly be connected to anyone in the world, why is loneliness and isolation at the forefront of our mental health conversations? Covid isolation mandates, polarising politics and societal injustices have all caused feelings of uncertainty, anger, sadness and isolation. And when our means of connection have changed so much, we can feel whiplash at the thought of how and when to socialise. The 2020s have highlighted the question: what does it mean to be connected to others and are we really feeling lonely?

Are we lonely or does everyone else look like they're having more fun?

It can feel odd talking about loneliness when it's easier for us to connect with others now than at any other time in history. However, the means of connecting have changed, and some of the most popular options are designed to encourage comparison to others. While we might enjoy a quiet night at home, if we then see others socialising (or having different experiences), we may then question our choices or things

about ourselves and our relationships that we otherwise wouldn't have. In fact, research has shown that if we think our relationships should be or feel a certain way because of a standard we've set, we may feel even more lonely. So, even if we do have friends we regularly see or talk with, we may still feel lonely because we are comparing our relationships to a standard that we saw on social media and incorporated into our thinking. Because of the design of social media, we also know it's hard to avoid comparing ourselves to others on social media, and that experience further amplifies feelings of loneliness. It doesn't actually matter what we do on social media, just being exposed to the content on the platform contributes to feelings of loneliness. We're not saying you should never go on social media again, but it's important to know that doing so can cause our feelings and behaviours to be hijacked without us realising it. Chief Clinical Officer of Togetherall, Dr Ben Locke, wants us to know that 'loneliness is

a real feeling, regardless of what prompted it, but there are a lot of ways to manage it'. We are social creatures, but also creatures of habit. Combine that with digital tools that can put us on autopilot, and we may be actively worsening our own feelings without realising it. So how do we get off autopilot? Dr Locke emphasises that it's not always easy, but it's worth it — and the more you do it, the better you'll become. 'Intention setting is one of the best ways we can combat loneliness. Our typical go-to move when feeling lonely or bored (or even uncomfortable) is to pick up our phone and scroll. The problem is that not only does this automatic behaviour not fix our lonely experience, but what you see suggests everyone else is not lonely and having a better time. To feel less lonely or isolated, we have to challenge ourselves to not do the easy and automatic thing. Instead, set an intention to connect with others or do something that makes us feel better.' People are drawn to social media because of new information and novelty. If this can lead us to feel lonely and isolated, it can also

have the power to do the opposite if you are intentional about which services you use.

To feel connected and supported by others, do we have to know who is giving us the support?

Research has shown that the greater the number of weaker ties someone has (people you may have casual conversations with, but not consider a friend), the happier they feel and the fewer depressed feelings they have. So, to have a happy and satisfied life, it doesn't necessarily have to be filled with best friends or super-close ties. Sometimes it can even feel easier to open up to someone who is not our closest confidant. While our closest friends and family may know the most intimate details of our life, it doesn't mean that we always want them to be involved in difficult or private problems. Sometimes we just want someone to listen to us. Period. If we find ourselves dealing with a difficult situation or difficult emotions, we typically prefer to talk with someone who has experienced something similar. This allows us to feel that we have a shared experience and that this will lead to greater understanding. In addition, sometimes it is just easier to share difficult details with people who are not a close friend or family member.

Feeling better even if we feel lonely

As the past few years have presented numerous physical, mental and emotional challenges for the world, it's easy to understand how loneliness and isolation

have kept people from feeling well. How can we feel better if, and when, we feel lonely? Recognising when we start to feel lonely can be a big step to helping us feel more connected.

♥ Set an intention each day to feel better:

If you find yourself feeling lonely, try setting an intention to cut down on screen time or maybe actively disengage from social media accounts that invite you to compare yourself to others. Simple strategies like setting a time-limit, scheduling your social media time for the day, or creating a daily reminder of the link between social media and wellbeing can be surprisingly effective.

♥ Engage with loose ties, meaning connect with others who may not be your best friend or family member:

Not every person can give us every type of support we may need, so widening your support network can help you feel understood with a greater sense of belonging. Allow yourself to open up and engage with a broader range of people and experiences.

♥ Connect with others who have had similar experience — even if you don't know them,

that sense of support and empathy can make us feel like we are part of a community who understands. And if you find yourself wanting to widen your network and sense of belonging, why not register with Togetherall, courtesy of the Rescue Benevolent Fund ☺



Mental health support online, **anonymous & 24/7.**

At Togetherall you can speak to someone who understands what you're going through, **anytime & anywhere.**

AS A MOUNTAIN OR CAVE RESCUE TEAM MEMBER YOU CAN ACCESS TOGETHERALL FREE OF CHARGE

The Togetherall digital mental health and wellbeing support service is a completely anonymous community where you can express yourself freely and openly. Professionally trained Wall Guides and clinical professionals monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all members. Once you're registered and logged in, there's a range of activities that allow you to work through what's troubling you. **Share your thoughts** with other community members, gain support and advice or offer YOUR valuable support to someone else who needs it. **Access a wealth of useful resources** and join self-guided courses covering the key topics which affect all our lives. Or take **clinically-approved self-assessments** to help you understand more about yourself. ☺

See below for instructions on how to register

1 Go to **togetherall.com** or scan QR code. Click 'Join'

2 To create account Select 'Which describes you?'

3 Select 'I'd like to search for my organisation'

4 Enter 'rescue' to find Rescue Benevolent Fund

5 Enter email. Create profile name. Enter details. Click 'Submit details'

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