

CONNECTED:**Friendship Line offers support to the lonely***Continued from page 5*

impairment; and lack of convenient transportation.

The spouse or caregiver of a person experiencing these issues can also experience social isolation. Caregivers often neglect their own needs while caring for someone else.

Human beings are hard-wired to affiliate, or connect with others. Loneliness affects millions of Americans either acutely or chronically. Everyday loneliness is painful when people are isolated from family and/or friends.

Lonely people may present as skeptical, distrusting, or staying on the periphery. They are not always easy to help. Loneliness can evolve into depression with the person saying things like, "I know I'm a burden. I just don't belong. Life's too difficult." What they are really saying is, "I am alienated from others." That depression, if not addressed, can lead to suicide. Recent studies demonstrate that the impact of loneliness on premature death is nearly as strong as that of disadvantaged socioeconomic status.

The Friendship Line can help by offering support through connection, conversation, and education. The call-out service can be scheduled for when a person feels the most afraid or vulnerable.

Not everyone who is lonely will become depressed. Not everyone who is depressed will become suicidal. But, in 2016, the American Association of Suicidology reported that adults aged 65 and over accounted for 8,204 suicides out of 44,965 for all ages.

Protective factors against suicide in the geriatric population include social connectedness, spirituality, a sense of responsibility (to family, friends, pets), and children in the home. Other factors are life satisfaction, the ability to test reality, positive coping strategies and problem-solving skills, and a positive therapeutic relationship.

Talking is often a very important means for the depressed person to find out why he is depressed. It is helpful to be able to identify the triggers that set the depression in motion.

While access to good healthcare and nutrition are essential to physical health in older people, social connection may be just as important. Imagine if the most powerful health intervention for the at-risk elderly isn't a high-tech surgery or a handful of expensive pills, but the simple exchange of stories during a telephone conversation.



Your Story
MATTERS
Audry Van Houweling, PMHNP
Columnist

Breaking the cycle of negative self-talk

How often do you seek out silence? Solitude? Are you afraid of it? Does it make you uncomfortable to be alone? Silence has become an anomaly in our high-speed, digitalized world and we have become accustomed to distraction that drowns out our own thoughts. Escapism via screen time, substances, spending money, pornography, food, and other means has become commonplace and has made embracing the present moment more and more elusive.

Many of us struggle with negative self-talk. Many of us avoid silence, being alone, and continually seek out ways to distract and temporarily pacify our negativity. We become accustomed to "noise," chaos, and obsession, which are all often a means to avoid confronting deeper roots of discontent. The noise, chaos, and obsessive thinking is named as the problem; however, addressing underlying core beliefs, trauma, and the "inner child" may feel even more problematic and thus the pattern of diversion continues. Many of us have also been told the cowboy lie to pull ourselves up from our bootstraps. Healing is not accomplished by running from our feelings. The medicine for pain is

allowing ourselves to feel the pain.

Perfectionistic attitudes, the superman/woman complex, and the belief that the means somehow justify the end can go hand in hand with this unrest. We believe that if we just push ourselves enough, endure an amount of suffering, deprive ourselves for long enough, then perhaps we will meet an end that finally makes us feel "worthy." This is not to say there is not value in hard work, but being attached to an outcome that somehow dictates our self-worth is problematic. Many of us are convinced that we must somehow punish ourselves to feel a sense of accomplishment. Sounds absurd, right? Well, yes, it is.

When we reach societal milestones of success, we reach them with the same self-deprecating, punitive mindset that led us there in the first place. Frustrated, we often find another obsession or distraction to latch onto. We find a convenient scapegoat — our weight, our job, relationships — as the source of our discontent, yet we are many times afraid to recognize ourselves as the common denominator. And by the way, this takes a lot of insight and humility.

Negative self-talk is learned, rooted often in childhood, and perpetuated through various life experiences, relationships, and socioeconomic circumstances among other factors. Confronting what can be traumatic is difficult and may demand professional help. It necessitates time to process, which means, yes, quiet, stillness, and space to be mindful.

Negative self-talk does not simply go away. We are all bombarded with constant comparison, societal expectations, and judgments that can make even the most

self-assured insecure. We can, however, strengthen our "inner observer" — that voice or conscience that questions the value or necessity of a thought or feeling. It is this observer that can acknowledge a feeling — not run from it, not distract it away, but see it for what it is and question the value of identifying with it or not. The inner observer invites curiosity about our feelings as we look to ask why the negativity is there in the first place.

Your inner observer may be akin to faith or the divine. It can become an internal compass allowing us to see toxicities with greater clarity and emboldens us to seek that which grounds us. This may lead to crossroads as you contemplate old patterns that kept you stuck versus new possibilities.

Ultimately, connecting to your inner observer means becoming comfortable with "you" again and questioning the stories we tell ourselves about our feelings. It

means recognizing the present moment and embracing the belief that perhaps simply because you are alive, able to breathe the air, and have the capacity to love and be loved might just mean that for right now in this moment life is OK — and perhaps even beautiful.



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