

Loneliness & Isolation Get Help

Occasional loneliness and isolation are normal parts of everyday life. When these feelings are prolonged, lead to difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships, negatively impact school performance or health, or cause low self-esteem or depression, it is time to get help. The earlier you identify and treat symptoms of prolonged loneliness or isolation, the faster you interrupt the advancement (which can lead to depression, thinking about or planning for suicide), and help your child feel better and thrive again.

If you as a parent or caretaker are experiencing prolonged loneliness and social isolation, it is just as important that you prioritize getting help for yourself as it would be to get help for your child.

Diagnosis

If you suspect your child has chronic loneliness and isolation, the first step is to confirm your suspicions. One step you can take is to talk with your child's primary care provider about getting a comprehensive mental health assessment to determine when their feelings and experiences began, what caused them, and if they keep your child from doing social activities typical for someone their age.

Depending on the results, the doctor may then refer your child to a community or peer-to-peer group or a mental health professional, who will try to understand your child's feelings, identify negative thoughts and perceptions about themselves, and teach healthy coping strategies for dealing with social situations. They will also develop a therapy plan that works best for your child and family. You should also partner with your child's teacher and school to better understand what they're seeing.

You can learn about the different types of mental health professionals [here](#).

Treatment

Parents, family members and teachers can play a strong role in helping to foster connections and build children's social skills by fostering peer interaction and working with children to develop age-appropriate social skills. For instance, for younger children, parents can create play dates or teachers can work to find a "buddy" to pair with your child. In addition, community organizations and peer-to-peer groups focused on a common interest can provide support, companionship and purpose.

Cognitive behavior therapy and talk therapy are effective at improving self-perception and confidence, addressing and decreasing negative self-talk, and developing effective coping strategies.

When children feel socially isolated, disconnected or alone, they may try to miss a lot of school, causing academic performance, friendships and emotional well-being to suffer. Teachers, nurses, school counselors or school psychologists are often the first to observe symptoms of loneliness and isolation in your child or know if they are struggling socially. They can intervene or create situations that foster peer interaction, work with you and your child to put identified coping strategies into practice, provide in-house counseling services, and recommend other community organizations that provide peer support, services and education. They can also look for signs of worsening or improving symptoms and notify you of any changes. Check with your PTA to see if they can help connect you to school supports and community resources.

It's important to note that there are certain behaviors that may legally require the school to take action. For example, if a child has suicidal thoughts, the school must require that a child gets a psychiatric evaluation before they can return to school.

If your child is having the urge to hurt themselves, immediately call 911 or take them to the nearest Emergency Room.