7 Ways for Teens and Young Adults to Combat Loneliness

If you're struggling with feelings of loneliness or isolation, please know you are not alone. It has been a growing trend among young people. Below are tips to consider from psychiatrist Gene Beresin, MD, including some he shares with his own patients.

1. **Extend yourself by giving to others.** This could mean becoming a volunteer in your community, or simply offering a lending hand to someone need. The process of extending yourself to others removes you from physical isolation, and the gratitude of connecting with others can be a relief. We also know that the process of giving releases oxytocin in the brain, which is instrumental in feeling attached.

2. **Try to understand why you are lonely.** You may feel lonely – even in the company of others – for any number of reasons: a significant loss; being excluded from a group; your state of mind. It's important to understand that loneliness is a personal feeling. Not everyone who loses someone feels lonely. Some just feel sad. If you feel lonely even in a crowd, it may be that earlier in life you did not have people around you who encouraged connection, understanding, or empathetic communication. By identifying where your personal loneliness stems from, you can then find ways to address it. Emotional struggles that require change can only be solved if we find the root cause, so we can take the best next steps.

3. **Practice mindful awareness.** Loneliness is a subjective feeling and perception. Many folks who are lonely view their situation as "the way life is." If you feel this way, it can lead to a lack of motivation to change things. Remember that *thoughts are not facts.* Nailing down specific negative thoughts you have about feeling lonely is a start to realizing how exaggerated they are. Things like, "Nobody likes me," or "There's no hope for connecting with others," are examples of thoughts that are overblown or just wrong. The point of this mindful awareness is to identify the distorted thoughts and then work (sometimes with a therapist) to change this way of thinking.

4. **Immerse yourself in creative arts.** Even when you feel lonely, engaging in the arts can often provide relief. When we read a page-turner, watch a captivating movie, or lose ourselves in music or a work of art, we may be able to distract ourselves from the painful feelings of loneliness and improve our mood. The arts also have healing properties in themselves.

5. **Join a group with others experiencing loneliness.** The process of talking about your own story and hearing that of others is often helpful in not feeling so alone. Humans respond in emotional ways to the stories of others, and, these interactions enhance mutual feelings of affirmation and validation, and improve self-esteem.

6. **Care for a pet.** There is a wealth of research on the value of pets for emotional well-being. Pets provide emotional support and connection, and these relationships also cause the release of oxytocin because of attachment. If it is a possible for you, caring for a pet can be a joyful experience.

7. **Join a community.** Humans are pack animals. Our brains are wired for social interactions. Communities are organized around missions – spiritual, political, common pursuits. They bring us together with common goals and help us feel that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

It's not pleasant to feel lonely, and it may take time to overcome feelings of isolation. But with personal effort and support from others, we *can* feel connected and renew a sense of personal wellbeing.