

# Cultivating Connectedness



**Student  
Well-Being**  
MCDONALD CENTER

# Staying Connected

It's not always easy to make new friends or stay connected to old ones.

We are wired for connection, however, and connectedness is a key aspect of well-being.

Disconnectedness can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation that are painful and hard.

This guide is designed to provide a starting point for ways to strengthen a sense of connection.



# EIGHT WAYS TO EASE THE PAIN OF LONELINESS

Emma Seppala

## Embrace Loneliness



Give the emotion full expression.



Go into silence.



Engage in mindful meditation.

## Cultivate Connection



Take care of your body.



Connect with nature.



Serve others.



Practice loving-kindness meditation.



Fall in love with yourself.

\*Content adapted from Emma Seppala's article "[Eight Ways to Ease the Pain of Loneliness](#)"

# LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

*Loving Kindness Meditation has been demonstrated to decrease loneliness and increase a sense of connectedness.*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be healthy.*

*May you be peaceful.*

*May you be safe.*

1. Sit comfortably and close your eyes if it feels right to you.
2. Focus on these loving kindness messages.
3. Imagine receiving these messages from those who love you.
4. Imagine sending these messages to people you love.
5. Imagine sending these messages to people who are neutral.
6. Imagine sending these messages to all living beings.

# MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

For Developing Friendships

*When the opportunity presents itself, set aside distractions  
and get to know each other on a deeper level.*

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, who would you choose as a dinner guest? Why?
2. Would you like to be famous? What would you like to be famous for?
3. What would constitute a perfect day for you?
4. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
5. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one quality or ability, what would it be?
6. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?
7. Is there something that you've dreamt of doing for a long time? What is it?
8. What's a cherished memory you hold from your childhood?
9. How would you describe your family to someone who's never met them? How are they similar or different from other families you've met?
10. What is your favorite thing to spend money on? Has it always been that way?
11. If you could retire tomorrow, what would you do?
12. What is a book you've read recently or movie you've watched that inspired or moved you? What did you like about it?
13. What are five things that cheer you up?
14. What's one of the best compliments you've received?
15. What role do you play in your family? Is that the same role you played as a kid?
16. How do you think your family views your life? Is it similar or different to how you think they imagined it would be?
17. How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
18. Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? Tell me about them.
19. What did you think you were going to be when you grew up? What was it about that job that interested you then?
20. What traditions have been passed down in your family?
21. How is the pandemic impacting your life?
22. What's the scariest part of the pandemic for you?
23. Tell me more about what your days look like now.
24. How are your kids, family, or partner doing? How has this impacted your work?
25. Create your own: \_\_\_\_\_



# LISTENING WELL

For Developing Friendships

*Asking questions only gets us so far in building connections. The next step is to listen well. Feeling seen, heard, and valued are important to the foundation of friendships.*



# SHARING WELL

For Developing Friendships

*Sharing parts of ourselves with others is an act of bravery and vulnerability. It is a necessary part of building friendships, however. Here are a few ways to be vulnerable.*

## 5 Expressions of Vulnerability

“Brene Brown defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.”

### 1 New Ways of Interacting

Extend an invitation to meet for coffee, text a greeting without an excuse, or introduce your families.

### 2 New Topics of Conversation

Expand conversations by introducing new topics, new emotions, or life experiences. Follow up in later conversations.

### 3 Share Your Shine

Share accomplishments, joys, and proud moments. Ask about your friend's "shiny" moments and celebrate them.

### 4 Areas of Insecurity

Share areas of insecurity, moments of regret, or worries that are troubling you.

### 5 Asking for What You Need

Practice mindful awareness of your own needs and preferences, and find ways to ask for those things in your relationship

# OFFER KINDNESS TO YOURSELF

Mindful Self Compassion

*This 5 minute exercise can quiet the critical voice in your mind and offer you a sense of connection with others.*

## Response to Loved One

Remember a time when a loved one was suffering or struggling. What did you say to that person? What tone of voice did you use?

## Response to Self

Think about a time when you were suffering or struggling. What did you say to yourself? What tone of voice did you use?

## Gratitude Practice

Your critical voice is the negative narrative that likely was apparent in the last step. Take a moment to thank your critical voice. Your gratitude doesn't suggest the voice is right or acceptable - it just acknowledges that it exists.

## Flip the Script

Take a moment to offer yourself the same kindness and compassion that you offered your loved one in the first step.



# OFFER KINDNESS TO OTHERS

*Offering kindness to others makes them feel good, makes us feel good,  
and strengthens our sense of connectedness.*

**List 5 "normal"  
day-to-day activities:**

**List ways to add an  
element of kindness:**

The worksheet consists of two columns of five green brushstroke boxes each. The boxes are arranged in a grid. Five blue curved arrows point from the left column to the right column, one for each row, indicating a flow of information or a relationship between the two columns.

# RESOURCES

- [Frientimacy](#)
- [Friendships Don't Just Happen](#)
- [Frientimacy Workbook](#)
- [Making Friendships Happen Workbook](#)
- [Limiting Loneliness During a Pandemic](#)
- [In 'Together,' Former Surgeon General Writes About Importance of Human Connection](#)
- [How Loneliness Hurts Us and What to Do About It](#)
- [Eight Ways to Ease the Pain of Loneliness](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [How to Find Your Self-Care Squad](#)
- [The Key Ingredient That Might Be Missing from Your Well-Being](#)
- [randomactsofkindness.org](https://randomactsofkindness.org)



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