



LONELINESS

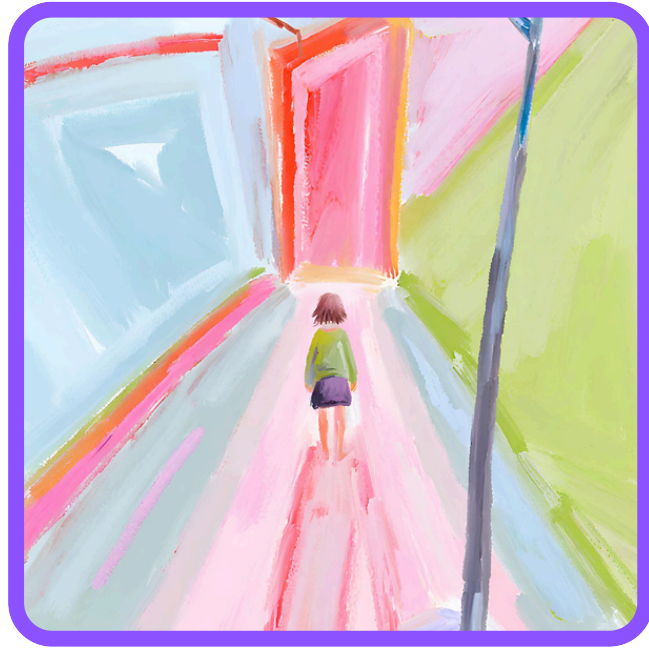


"Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty." -Mother Teresa



At the intersection of loneliness, fear, pain, & childhood trauma lie the manifestations of depression, anxiety, addiction, and suicide.

Beneath these lies the need for connection.



The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared loneliness to be a pressing global health threat, with the US surgeon general saying its mortality effects are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Loneliness is not merely the absence of company but a profound sense of disconnection and alienation from others.

Loneliness has become a pervasive and silent epidemic.



Loneliness can be triggered by social isolation, lack of meaningful connections, or unresolved emotional turmoil.

Young people experiencing loneliness at school are more likely to drop out of university. Loneliness affects every facet of health, wellbeing, and development.



According to a 2018 report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 22 percent of all adults in the US say they often or always feel lonely or socially isolated. In older adults, loneliness is associated with a 50% increased risk of developing dementia and a 30% increased risk of incident coronary artery disease or stroke.

More than 1 in 3 adults aged 45 and older feel lonely in the United States.

*“Belonging starts with self-acceptance.
Your level of belonging, in fact, can never be
greater than your level of self-acceptance.”*

—Brené Brown

Research suggests loneliness especially impacts low-income adults, young adults, older adults, adults living alone, people with chronic diseases & disabilities, immigrants & those who identify as LGBTQ+.



Other factors include poverty, psychiatric disorders, marginalization, discrimination, lack of resources, language barriers, chronic diseases, living alone or being a victim of violence.



Connecting with ourselves is the cornerstone to establishing meaningful connections with others.

We can become disconnected from our own thoughts, emotions, and bodies. Taking time to cultivate self-awareness & self-compassion is essential for fostering authentic relationships with those around us.

The more secure we are in ourselves, the more likely we are to express ourselves openly.

Connecting with ourselves allows us to cultivate self-compassion & empathy, permits us to extend kindness & understanding to ourselves & enables us to approach others with greater empathy & compassion.



Connecting with oneself lets us set healthy boundaries and prioritize self-care. When we are attuned to our own needs and boundaries, we are better able to communicate these, and advocate for ourselves.

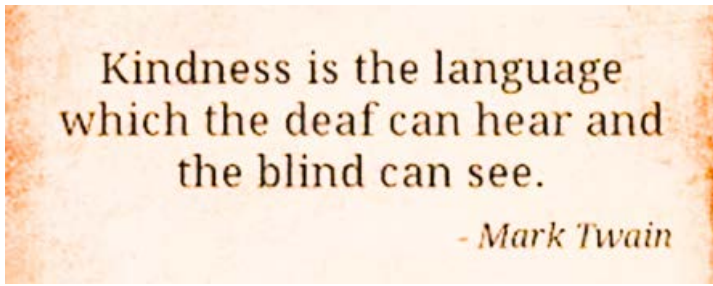


By cultivating self-awareness, self-compassion, & emotional intelligence, we can show up authentically and empathetically in our interactions with others.

Grounded in ourselves and our values, we are able to foster deeper connections.

*We pause
& wait
for moments to appear,
for spring to sprout,
for summer's shout,
for autumn's breeze
or winter's freeze,
& shudder with inept sensations,
wishing for a swift cessation,
for resolutions to occur,
or revolutions to secure,
with milk & honey
or love or money,
that health returns
& days are sunny...
& we let the moments pass,
as the scent of coffee wafts,
as the blood flows through our veins,
as the moon waxes & wanes,
as the tastes & sounds & sights
fail to thrill or to delight,
& in the wonder of existence
we persist with such resistance,
& never realize the depth -
the jewel of a single breath.*



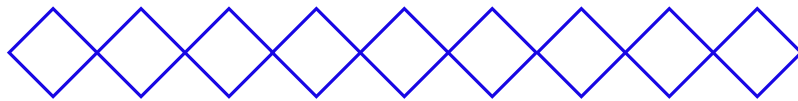


Self-Care is not selfish.

Self-Care is the foundation upon which we build our ability to care for others and develop resilience.

Without it, we risk diminished capacity to show up fully in our roles and relationships.

In honoring our own needs, we sustain ourselves and can become wellsprings of vitality, compassion, and strength for those around us.

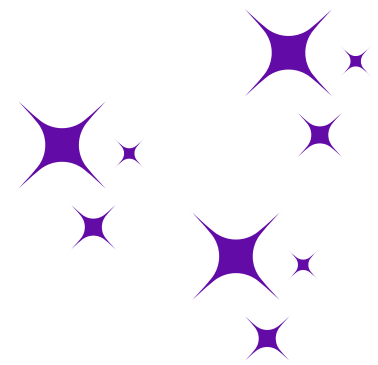


Self-care combats loneliness by fostering self-awareness, self-compassion, and meaningful connections. Prioritizing activities that nurture physical, emotional, and social well-being cultivates a sense of belonging and fulfillment.

By investing in our own wellness, we strengthen resilience and create a foundation for deep, meaningful relationships with others, reducing feelings of isolation.

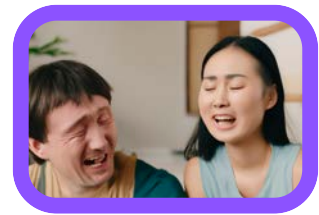
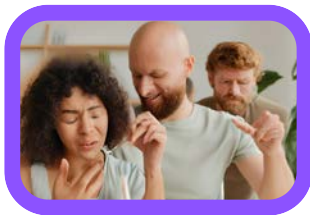


Ways to Reconnect



Let's look at some basic steps to reconnect to the amazing human being you truly are:

Notice what you're feeling. Take a moment to pause and identify where in your body you're holding your stress. Once you discover any tension, focus on breathing into it.



Name your feeling. Naming our feelings leads us to solutions and greater resiliency by allowing us to master and gain a sense of power over our feelings.

ECSTATIC

ANGUISH

Shame

AWE

GRIEF

appreciated!

Accept your thoughts and emotions without judgment, to help let go of stress, and feel more grounded and aware.



Connect through solitude by engaging in solo activities such as walking in nature, petting your dog or cat, creating art, listening to music or cooking dinner.



Practice self-compassion

At the heart of combating loneliness lies self-compassion, the practice of extending kindness and understanding to oneself.

Acknowledging one's emotions without judgment fosters resilience and self-worth, essential qualities in navigating solitude.

Engaging in self-care rituals, such as mindfulness meditation, journaling, or pursuing hobbies, nurtures a sense of inner fulfillment and connection.

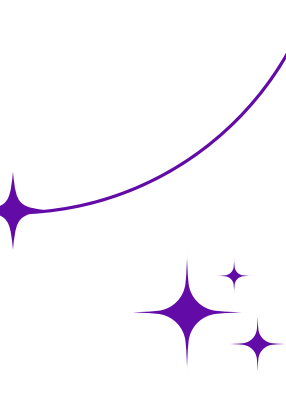


According to Kristin Neff, Ph.D., self-compassion consists of three components:

Self-kindness: Be kind, gentle and understanding with yourself .

Common humanity: You are not alone in your struggles. When we're struggling, we tend to feel isolated. These struggles are our shared experiences as humans.

Mindfulness: Observe life as it is, without judgment or suppressing thoughts and feelings.

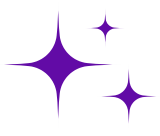


“IF YOU WANT
others to be happy,
practice kindness.
IF YOU WANT
—to be happy,—
practice kindness.”

- The Dalai Lama



ben's bells project



Being self-compassionate might seem unnatural at first. These strategies can help:

Imagine what you would say to a close friend in your situation. How would you treat them? Direct those same words toward yourself.

BE KIND
to yourself

Watch your language. If you wouldn't say the same statements to someone you care about, don't say them to yourself.

Comfort yourself with a physical gesture. For instance, put your hands over your heart or simply hold your arm.



Memorize a set of compassionate phrases.
Choose statements that resonate with you.
Combining them with a physical gesture — like hands over your heart — is especially powerful. Some examples include:

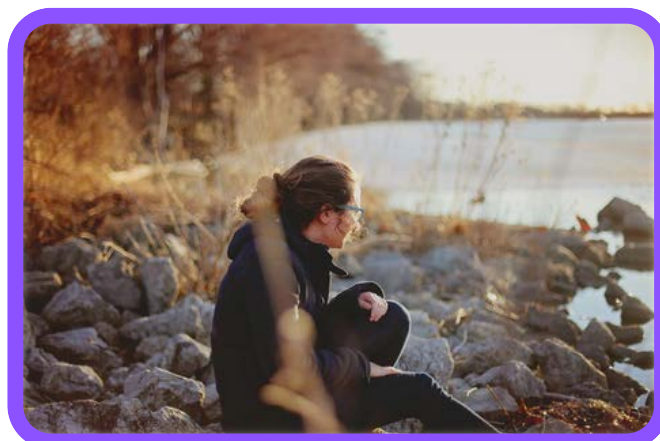
- This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life.
- May I be kind to myself in this moment?
- May I give myself the compassion I need?

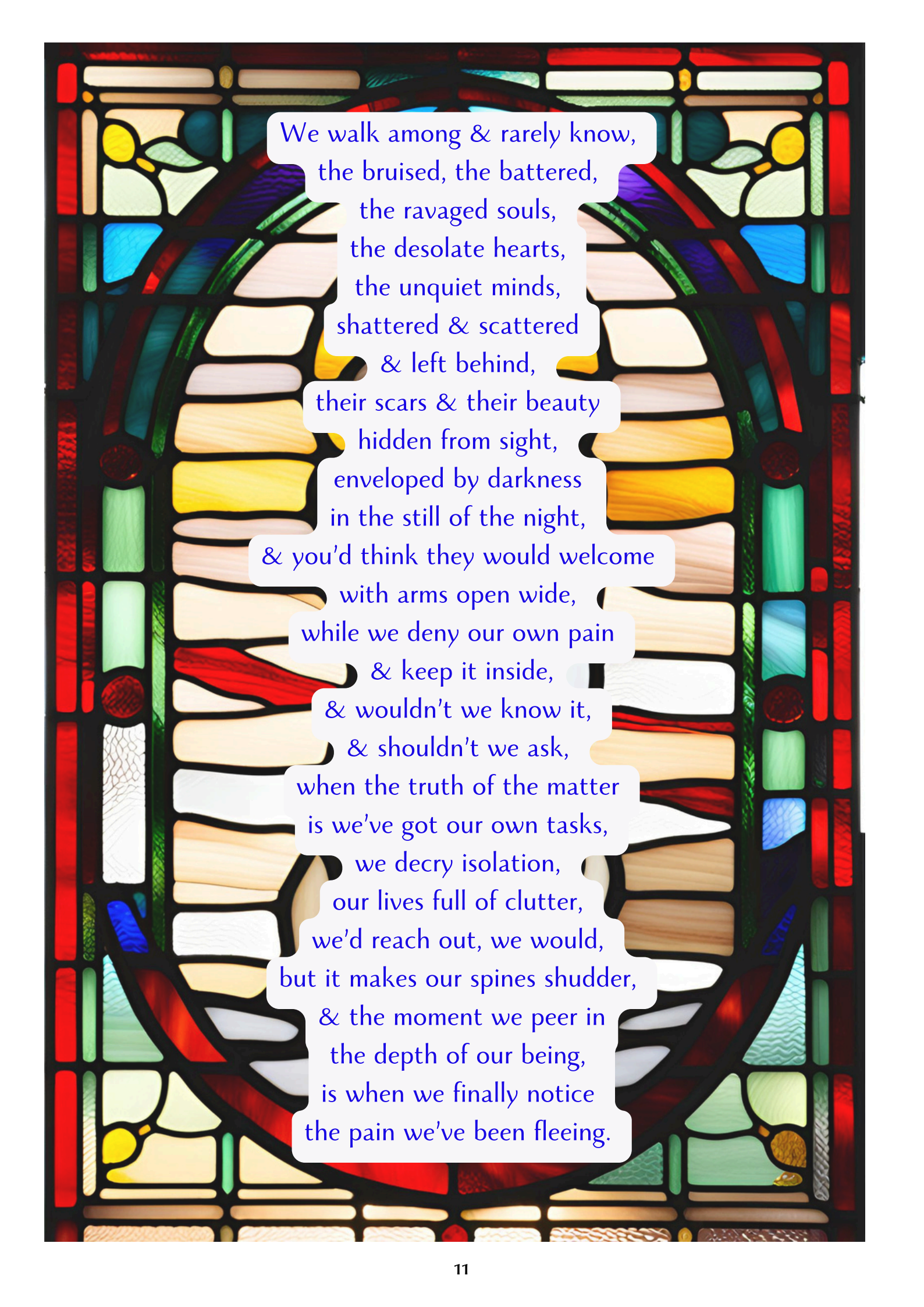


“The foundation for connecting with other people is connecting with our self..”
—Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, 19th Surgeon General of the United States



Spend quality time alone to reconnect with yourself, introspect, and recharge. Engage in solitary pursuits such as reading, painting, or nature walks to cultivate self-awareness and inner peace. Reframe solitude as an opportunity for self-discovery to transform loneliness into solitude's enriching counterpart.



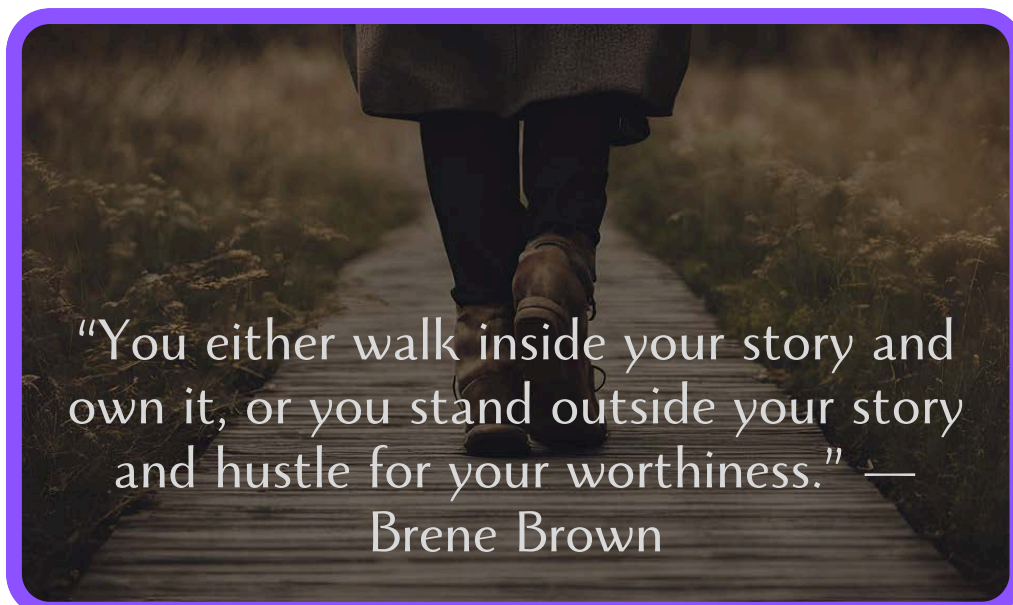


We walk among & rarely know,
the bruised, the battered,
the ravaged souls,
the desolate hearts,
the unquiet minds,
shattered & scattered
& left behind,
their scars & their beauty
hidden from sight,
enveloped by darkness
in the still of the night,
& you'd think they would welcome
with arms open wide,
while we deny our own pain
& keep it inside,
& wouldn't we know it,
& shouldn't we ask,
when the truth of the matter
is we've got our own tasks,
we decry isolation,
our lives full of clutter,
we'd reach out, we would,
but it makes our spines shudder,
& the moment we peer in
the depth of our being,
is when we finally notice
the pain we've been fleeing.

Self-Compassion Exercise:

Before you begin, choose a phrase, an affirmation.
You may create your own, or use one of the following:

- May I be kind to myself in this moment.
- I am worthy of love and kindness.
- I am worthy of compassion and understanding.
- I acknowledge my struggles and honor the strength it takes to face them.
- I am worthy of understanding and patience.
- I embrace my imperfections with self-compassion.
- I release the need for perfection and accept myself as is.
- I choose self-compassion over self-criticism.



Self-Compassion Exercise:

Make yourself comfortable, shifting your body weight so you are well supported and at ease. Uncross your legs to allow blood to run freely through your veins. Find a spot in the room, and let your eyes softly focus on that spot...

I matter

...and now pay attention to your breath, taking deep, slow breaths, focusing on the sensation of each inhale and exhale...

...and as you exhale, if it feels safe and comfortable, you may allow your eyes to close...

inhale
exhale

... and with each inhale, send loving kindness to each cell in your body, and with each exhale, allow stress and tension to leave your body... focusing on the sensation of each inhale and each exhale...



...and now shift your attention to your body. Start from your toes and gradually move up, paying attention to any areas of tension or discomfort. As you notice tension, inhale loving-kindness into that area and exhale stress and tension.



...and as you continue to inhale loving-kindness and exhale stress and tension, recall your affirmation of self-compassion, and send these words to any place in your body where you feel stress, tension, or discomfort...

...imagine you are in a place that brings you peace and comfort. It could be a beach, a forest, or a cozy room. Imagine yourself in this place, surrounded by warmth and acceptance...



...and now, take a moment to reflect on three things you are grateful for about yourself. These could be qualities, achievements, or even small victories. Embrace a sense of appreciation for yourself...



...as you slowly bring your awareness back to your breath. Take a few deep breaths, feeling the connection between your body and the present moment. When you are ready, open your eyes.



Exercises to Foster Connection



Deep Breathing Meditation:

- Find a comfortable seated position
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath.
- Inhale deeply through your nose, feeling your lungs expand.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, releasing any tension.
- Repeat this deep breathing pattern, allowing it to anchor you in the present moment and calm your mind.



Gratitude Journaling:

- Each day, write down three things for which you are grateful.
- They can be as simple as a cup of tea or a friendly smile.
- Reflect on the positive aspects of your life to shift your focus away from feelings of isolation and remind you of the connections and blessings you have.



Share Your Talents with Others:

- We all have gifts and talents.
- Share them with others:
- Participate in relevant volunteer activities.
- If you don't know your talents, ask someone who knows you!

• SPREAD • Kindness

Random Acts of Kindness:

- Look for opportunities to perform random acts of kindness.
- It could be as simple as:
 - sending a thoughtful text message
 - offering to help a neighbor with errands
 - or donating to a local charity.
- Acts of kindness not only brighten someone else's day but also foster a sense of connection and purpose within yourself.



Outdoor Walks:

- Spend time outdoors and connect with nature.
- Go for a walk in a nearby park or nature reserve.
- Take in the sights, sounds, and smells around you.
- Ground yourself in the beauty of the natural world.
- Being in nature strengthens one's sense of social connection, even when we are alone.

STAY
CURIOUS!

Be Curious:

- We are attracted to others who are interested in us.
- Ask questions of the people you meet.
- Open up about your interests and passions.
- Focus on the person with whom you're interacting.



Creative Expression:

- Engage in a creative activity that brings you joy, such as music, drawing, painting, writing, or crafting.
- Allow yourself to express your thoughts and emotions without judgment or pressure.
- Join online creative communities or workshops.



Practice Mindfulness in Everyday Activities:

- Bring mindfulness to your daily routines by:
 - focusing on the present moment
 - and savoring each experience.
 - washing dishes
 - taking a shower
 - or walking the dog
- Notice the sensations, sights, & sounds around you.
- Mindfulness cultivates a sense of connection to the present moment & enhances appreciation for simple pleasures.



Incorporating these into your daily routine, will help you feel more connected to yourself and others.

Be patient with yourself and reach out for support when needed. You're not alone, and there are always opportunities to cultivate connection and foster a sense of belonging in your life.

Expanding your Social Circle can be Fulfilling and Rewarding

Here are Some Ways to Begin:



- **Join Clubs or Groups:** Consider joining clubs, hobby groups, sports teams, or volunteer organizations related to your interests. This provides an opportunity to meet people with common passions.



- **Take Classes:** Enroll in classes or workshops, such as cooking, art, language, or fitness classes. Not only will you learn something new, but you'll also have the chance to interact with classmates.



- **Use Social Media:** Utilize social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, or Meetup to find local events and groups that align with your interests.

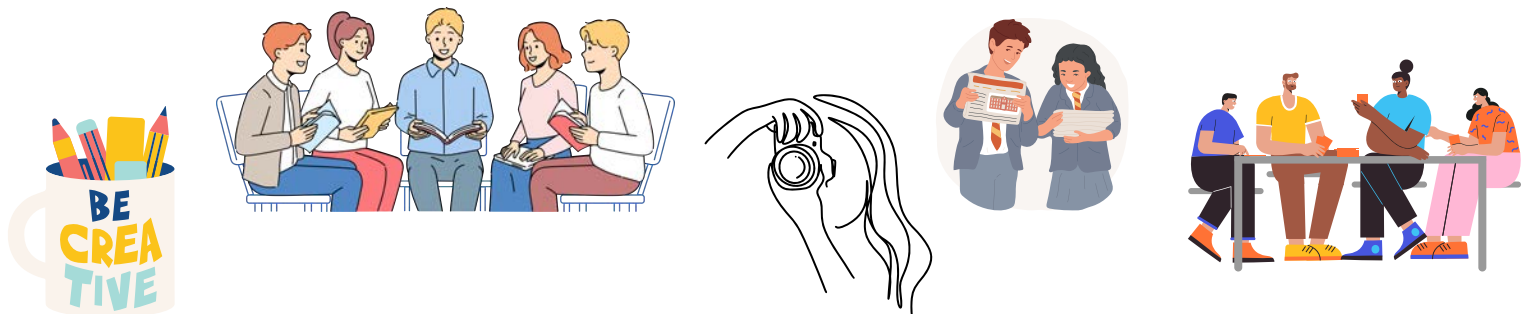


Volunteer: Volunteer for causes or organizations that you care about. This not only allows you to give back to your community but also introduces you to like-minded individuals.



*We ♥ our
Volunteers*

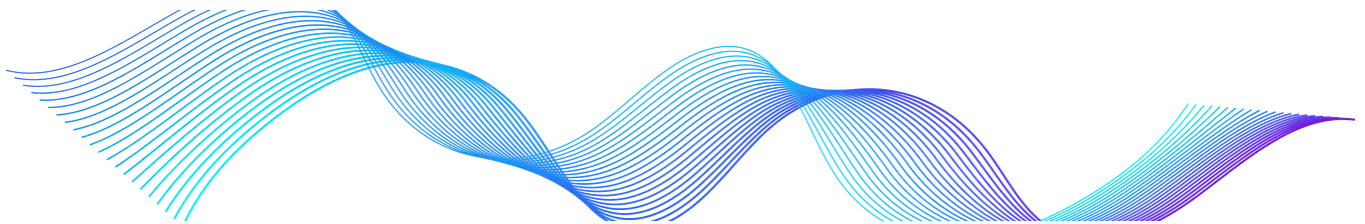
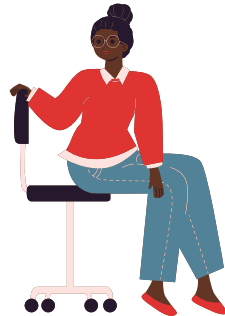
Take up a New Hobby: Explore new hobbies or interests that involve group activities, such as photography clubs, book clubs, creative writing clubs, or board game nights. This allows you to meet people with similar interests while learning something new.



Join a Religious or Spiritual Community: If you're religious or spiritual, consider attending services, gatherings, or events at your local place of worship. These communities often provide opportunities for social interaction and support.



Sign up for a Fitness Classes: Participate in sports leagues, group fitness classes, or outdoor activities like hiking or cycling. These environments provide opportunities for socializing while staying active, and are often offered at a variety of fitness levels.



Join a Support Group: If you're dealing with specific challenges or going through a major life transition, consider joining a support group. This could be for topics like grief support, addiction recovery, or health-related issues. Connecting with others who understand your experiences can be incredibly supportive.

Expanding your social circle takes time and effort. Be patient, be yourself, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone to meet new people. Even making small talk with people you know casually can reap great rewards.



The best & worst we do,
we do to ourselves,
misguided, misaligned
& suffering in silence,
this is the space between us—
we avert our eyes
to escape detection
& lose connection,
even to ourselves,
the original sin—
now is the time
to celebrate the totality
of our being,
of each other,
the fabric of our skin,
the axons & neurons of our minds,
& the cut of our jibs—
flabby & crabby
& far removed from the images
of perfection to which
we are made to feel inferior—
we have triumphed over time & space,
to be in this place,
here & now,
we will take each breath
with intention & gratitude,
no longer allow platitudes
to knock us off our feet,
we will rise to the occasion
to defeat this loneliness
which has stalked us
through the cold & the heat,
& in the winter
of our newfound contentment,
reach out without resentment,
to reject the forces of division & separation,
& find salvation in relationship.

For further information:

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©2012

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Parker, Riverhead Books ©2020

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Language of Human Experience: Brené Brown, Ph.D., MSW,
Random House ©2021

IntraConnected: MWe (Me + We) as the Integration of Self,
Identity, and Belonging: Daniel J Siegel M.D., W. W. Norton &
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The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic
Culture: Gabor Maté, M.D. and Daniel Maté, Avery ©2022



**Community
Connections
Summit:**

**Addressing the
Loneliness
Epidemic**