

## When Loneliness Moves In



Loneliness can occur at any age and is generally reported more among children and teens than the elderly. This can be surprising to learn since the elderly can have limitations that prevent more active social engagement. However, with age comes years and experiences that produce coping skills, tolerance of distressing feelings and long-lasting connections. The young person's brain is not fully developed in the area of logical thinking, emotional regulation and objective decision making. Without these skills on board, children and teens are much more likely to have "all or nothing" thinking that limits problem solving. This added to limited lived experience makes them vulnerable to the abundance of social media implying others are living a more exciting life that makes theirs pale in comparison!

Loneliness in young people can occur for many of the same circumstances as adults: loss of a relationship due to a break up, friendship fractures (think middle school) and loss due to death. Being excluded can greatly contribute to loneliness as well. In my experience, children who feel excluded from classmates, teammates or other peers can really suffer from not only loneliness but also a lack of self-worth, competency and confidence. Keep in mind, being with others does not eliminate loneliness. It takes a true connection of acceptance and reciprocity to feel connected.

The best inoculation for loneliness in children and teens is the development of strong social skills which is the foundation of friendship and connection. These skills are best developed very early in childhood but can be learned at any age. Creating a home environment where friends are welcome anytime is important. Helping young children build and keep relationships takes a commitment and intention on the part of parents to facilitate interaction.

Examples include the following:

1. Going to classmates' birthday parties.
2. Volunteering in your child's classroom – perfect opportunity to meet the other children.
3. Hosting your child's birthday parties and including classmates.
4. Encouraging your child to join a team – softball, flag football, soccer.
5. As parents, talk to your child's teammates' parents – suggest getting a pizza or hamburger after the game.
6. Set up Saturday meet-ups with other families at a local park.
7. LIMIT electronic usage so children are more motivated to connect and engage in person.

Electronic gaming and streaming devices can isolate children, even when they are in the electronic company of others. Playing a game online with others creates a very limited, artificial relationship as opposed to a four-dimensional friendship. Electronics do not challenge children to develop connection, nor do they build social skills.

Teens who experience loneliness have some additional options depending on their age. In the middle and high schools, joining civic organizations and other extra-curricular clubs such as theater can create a built-in purpose and connection. Working part time is another option, as is volunteering. Teens can consider taking a class in a subject they enjoy that will introduce them to like-minded peers and supportive adults.

Talk to your child/teen about what is going on with them – what is working, where are they struggling, where and to whom they are connected. This will provide you with some insight into whether they are lonely for a particular reason (such as a friendship fracture) or if the loneliness is more generalized. Watch for signs of depression such as sleeping and eating changes, self-critical remarks, changes in hygiene, growing isolation from others. If you notice these changes, you may want to intervene with the help of a mental health professional.

Feeling connected to others is a profound human need. Learning the skills necessary to connect in healthy ways is easiest in childhood where opportunities abound. Parents can facilitate these opportunities in a myriad of ways. While friendships can ebb and flow, the skills to connect, once developed, are always available as a resource throughout life.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Thanks to our donors and grantors, Lee's Place provides over 300 clients each year with loss and trauma therapy.

We often are helping all members of a family.

We serve all ages, beginning as young as 4, for all types of loss and trauma. Loss and trauma can include: adoption, incarceration, foster children, in addition to crime, death, suicide and abuse. Education to the community is part of our mission:

- We work with businesses when a staff person has had a tragedy. Their experience can have a ripple effect through a business.
- We speak at professional organizations and businesses on how to be ready when a tragedy occurs, and how to best help your staff or members

Lee's Place is named for our president and founder's son, Lee Rabalais. Many of our donors and board members knew Lee and continuing his legacy means the world to them, and to all of us.

## Thank you to Leon Key Club Members

Emma, Camille, and Jordan for working so hard in our garden. We are very grateful.



## AAMLF

We are honored to have received two grants from the American Association of Matrimonial Lawyers Foundation. Thank you to the AAMLF staff!!!



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## Lee's Place Mission Statement:

*To provide quality therapy to adults, children, and families, regardless of their financial circumstances, who are coping with loss, trauma, and life changing experiences, while offering specialized training and education to the community.*





# Feel Better! Reduce that Anxiety!

By Brenda Rabalais, PhD, LMFT

Anxiety has become a major health factor in the US, affecting elementary school age children all the way up to the senior population. Anxiety manifests as perseverative thinking, sleep disturbances, lowered immune function, stomach upsets, headaches, cloudy thinking, reduced ability to make good decisions, along with a general overall feeling of not being in control or safe. When anxiety is chronic, it can be a causal factor in many chronic diseases such as autoimmune disease, heart problems, cancer, hives, Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome, to name a few. Some people think that anxiety is just part of their personality, who they are. However, anxiety is a learned response usually acquired when very young. It is worth our while to address this pattern of responding in our lives and develop new ways of responding that are more beneficial for our wellbeing and health. Below are a few ways to help reduce anxiety that you can implement in your everyday life.

- Be in nature as often as possible.
- Take part in regular strenuous exercise.
- Breathe deep slow breaths into the tummy, then a long, slow exhale. The tummy extends on the inhale, and flattens on the exhale. Diaphragmatic breathing turns off the fight/flight response.
- Make sleep a priority.
- Severely restrict sugar and caffeine.
- Take control of your thoughts. Ask, "Where are my thoughts?" Are they repetitive, spinning, worrisome thoughts? If so, change your thoughts on purpose to something that feels better (remember the fun time at the beach, decide what to cook for dinner).
- Get in present time by noticing 3 things you feel, see and hear. For example; feeling what's under my feet, how many blue things do I see, what are three things I hear. By getting in present time, you will notice you're not in danger (the anxiety response).
- Slow the talk in your head to a deep voiced, slow tone. Practice this slow deep talk everyday.



## Client Testimonials

"It has never been easy for me to talk about myself and my feelings, but after my sessions at Lee's Place, I now more fully understand myself and what it is that I want and need. I feel more in charge of my own life. Thank you!"

-- 33 year old client

"I felt so completely and utterly lost after losing my partner. I couldn't imagine life without her. With the serenity of Lee's Place and weekly sessions with a gentle therapist, I felt heard, never judged - and I am beginning to feel the pieces come back together again."

-- 62 year old client

"As one who was very hesitant about therapy and talking about my feelings, coming to Lee's Place has made me see all sorts of things in a whole new light. Thank you."

-- 22 year old client

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## Many Thanks to Board Member Andra Copeland

Andra has been an involved and dedicated board member since 2021. As a retired preschool director, she understands the need for quality art supplies for children. Andra donated top quality markers, construction paper, sketch pads and other much needed materials for our children to use in therapy. We appreciate you, Andra, as a Board Member and also as a thoughtful donor.

March 2023

RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. REGISTRATION # CH13571

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As therapists, we are always seeking insight and information that may be helpful for ourselves and others. Podcasts and apps for meditation, self-healing and learning more about yourself are great resources that we use and will often suggest for clients. Here are some of our favorites:

**Mental Health Podcasts and Apps**

**PODCASTS**

All There Is - Anderson Cooper's exploration of grief and loss regarding the death of his mom, Glorinda Vanderbilt, his dad and the loss by suicide of his brother. He talks with guests like Stephen Colbert and Molly Shannon about their grief experiences as well.

On Purpose - Hosted by Jay Shetty, who wrote the book, How to Live Like a Monk. Features conversations with guests that focus on self discovery and self improvement.

**APPS**

Insight Timer - Free meditation app for sleep, anxiety and stress relief.

Ten Percent Happier – Includes brief courses for learning stress-reduction skills like mindfulness, meditation, as well as individual short videos on a range of topics related to living your life to the fullest.