

Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and Making Friends

Loneliness

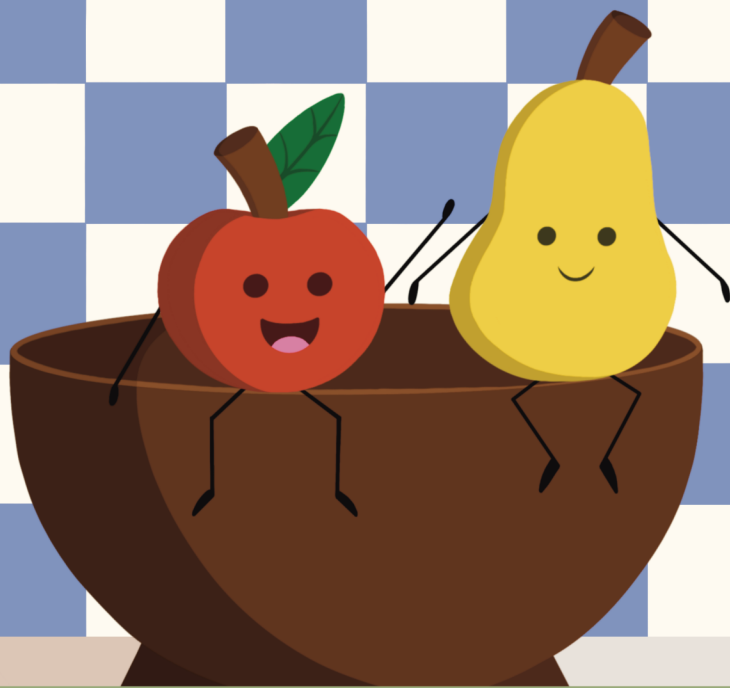
Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quality of the social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

Types of Loneliness:

- Emotional Loneliness: The absence of meaningful relationships
- Social Loneliness: A perceived deficit in the quality of social connections
- Existential Loneliness: A feeling of fundamental separateness from others and the wider world
- Transient Loneliness: A feel that comes and goes
- Situational Loneliness: Only occurring at certain times like Sundays, bank holidays, or Christmas
- Chronic Loneliness: Feeling lonely all or most of the time

Feeling lonely is not necessarily the same as being alone. Some people can spend lots of their time on their own and still feel content. Others may be surrounded by people but feel disconnected from them and lonely.

Loneliness is a natural and sometimes even healthy part of life. It's a normal emotion just like anger, joy, etc.

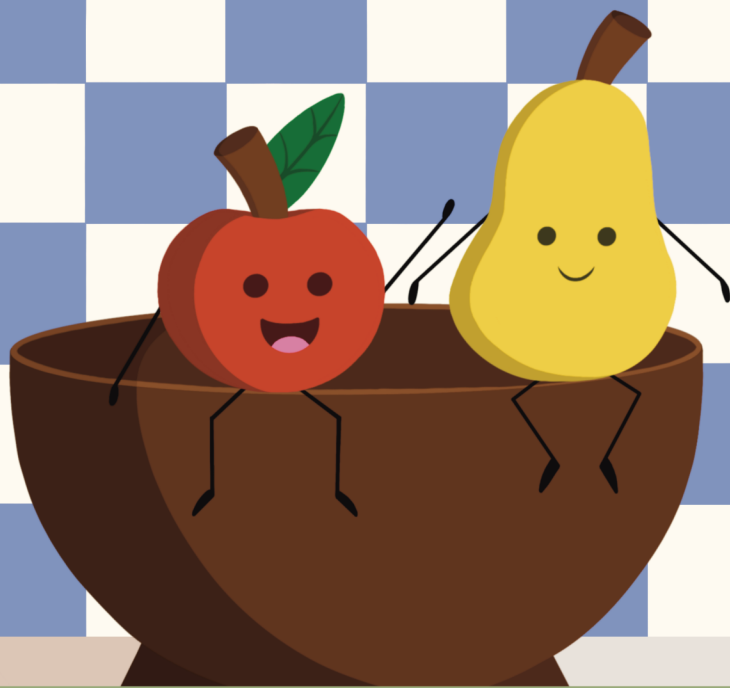


Social Anxiety

Social Anxiety is a disorder characterized by overwhelming anxiety or self-consciousness in ordinary social situations. In milder cases, the symptoms of social anxiety only appear in specific situations, such as public speaking. On the more extreme end, any form of social interaction can act as a trigger.

Oftentimes the social anxiety will lead a person to build their life in a “safe” way that shields them from their fears, rather than living how they truly want. This is a form of **avoidance**, which will actually make anxiety worse over time. These behaviors can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Speaking very little or softly
- Holding arms stiffly at sides to prevent trembling
- Standing far from others to avoid conversation
- Avoiding sharing personal information
- Avoiding making eye contact
- Constantly checking or obsessing over appearance prior to socializing
- Coming up with reasons to leave social events early
- Using drugs/alcohol
- Avoiding eating in front of others
- Avoiding asking questions



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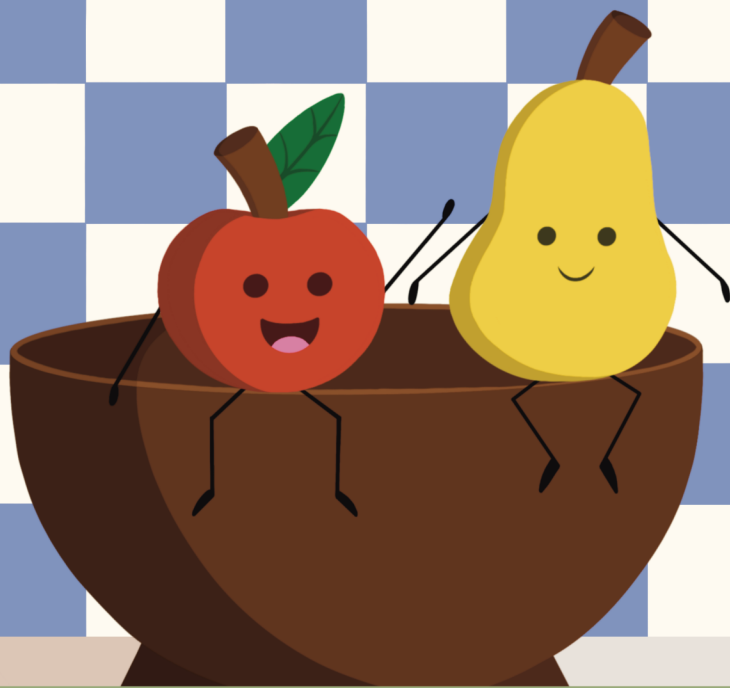
- Excessively rehearsing what to say before socializing
- Using distractions to appear busy (e.g. phone, TV)
- Talking excessively to avoid silence
- Lying or exaggerating to look better
- Continually seeking reassurance or approval
- Caving to peer pressure or wishes of others

Tips for Making Friends

Making friends as an adult can feel challenging. There are less “built-in” activities that allow for friendships to blossom organically. Making friends and building a community are important protective factors against loneliness and social isolation. Here are some tips for making friends in adulthood:

Incorporate more routine into your day:

- Do you go on a run every morning? Try running at the same park for a week.
- Go back to that restaurant around the block at least once a month.
- Developing routine helps you see the same faces on a regular basis and increases your chance of connecting with someone.



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Find your "Third Place":

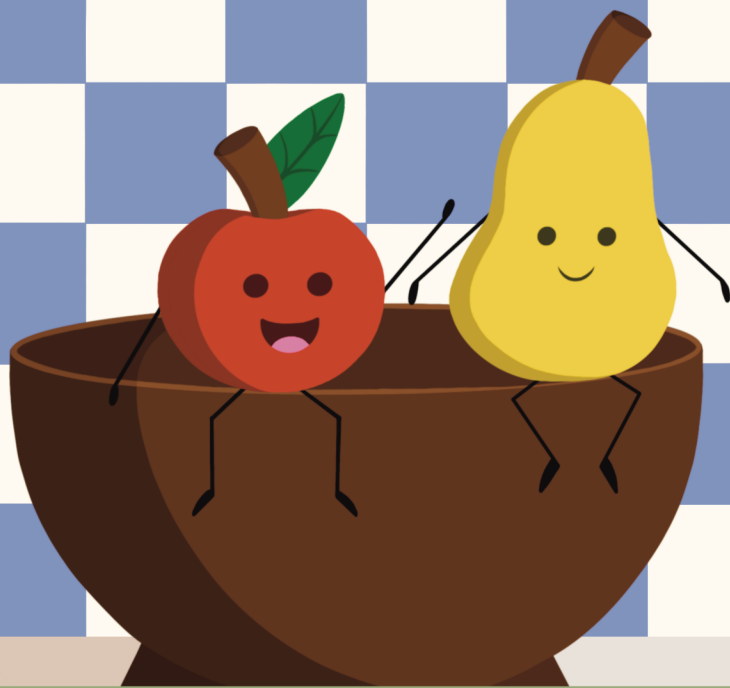
- "Third Places" are public spaces, typically outside of the home (First Place) and work/school (Second Place), where people can connect with others, socialize, and engage in community life.
- This could be a coffee shop, library, club, park, sports team,
- community center, gym, volunteer organization, etc.

Focus on connection instead of outcome:

- To avoid putting pressure on yourself, focus on staying present in social interactions instead of focusing on it leading to a friendship
- Focus your energy on one-to-one interactions
- Only say "yes" to social invitations that bring you joy

Feeling shy, nervous, or anxious is normal"

- It's okay to feel shy, nervous, or anxious when trying to make new friends
- Remember not to push yourself too hard, but keep showing up and trying to interact with others
- You can feel nervous and still try your best to talk to new people
- Remember that many people feel nervous, anxious, or shy when meeting others



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Don't be afraid to show people how much you like and trust them:

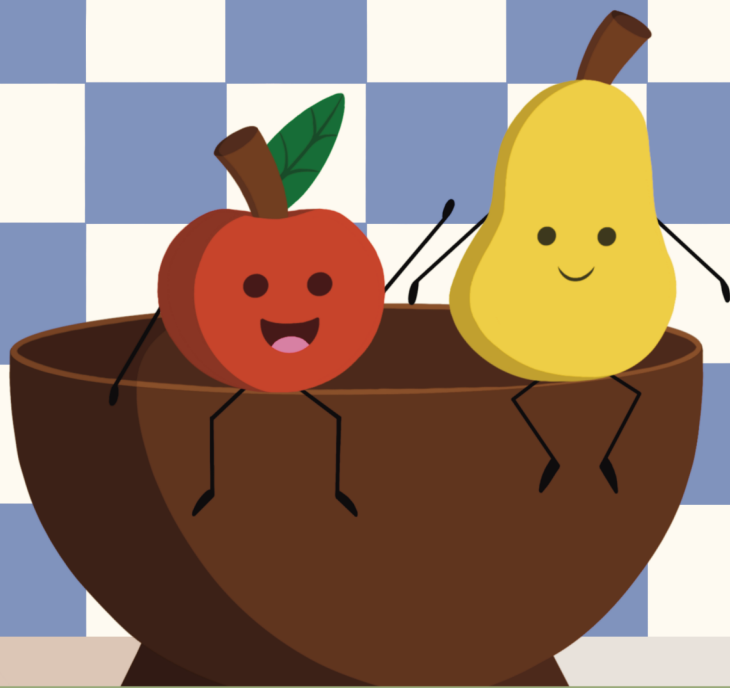
- A study published in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships found the number one feature people look for in a friend is someone who likes and values them
- Practice revealing to people that you like them. You can tell them how happy you are to hear from them, compliment them, greet them warmly, or share what you like about them or when something they said resonated with you.

Ask questions:

- What do you enjoy doing in your free time?
- Do you have any favorite books, movies, or TV shows you'd recommend?
- How's work/school going for you right now?
- What do you like about where you...(live/go to school/work/etc.)?

Consider asking for a favor:

- Research has shown that for happiness, providing support is just as important as getting support. If done reasonably, offering people a way to provide support to us can generate good feelings in them.



Sources/References

Sources/References

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