

COPING WITH LONELINESS

Everyone has experienced loneliness at some point in their life, and if you are feeling this way right now you are definitely not the only student. It is normal and human to feel lonely. Loneliness is caused by there being a discrepancy between the social and interpersonal connections you want and what you have. The focus on connection here is important: you may have a lot of friends and people around you, but it is the quality of those friendships and connections that influence the feeling of being alone.

Homesickness, culture shock, and isolation are common and natural to experience in any new environment, but are especially heightened in a small town/campus setting. Maybe you don't feel connected to your classmates, roommates, or the college community. Maybe there are not as many social opportunities as you'd like, or even solo activities in the area that fit your unique interests. Maybe you thought it would be different or you would feel differently by this point in the year. Maybe you've been trying to put yourself out there and are feeling rejected and dejected. All of this can feel very discouraging. So, what can you do?

ACCEPT THE WAY YOU FEEL

Acknowledge that you feel alone or isolated and wish things were different.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU ARE MISSING

The second step is identifying what exactly you are missing. Are you missing companionship and just having others to do activities with, like going to the movies? Are you maybe more missing having someone you can connect with on a deeper level and feel unconditionally supported by?

EXPLORE HOW YOU CAN MEET SOME OF THOSE NEEDS

The third step is exploring how you can try or continue to try to combat your feelings of loneliness. If you're missing deeper connection, prompt talks about fears and values with your friends. Connect more with strangers, even if just small talk in the grocery store. If you're missing companionship, invite a colleague to a movie or fitness class. Get a part-time job or look into groups at school, work, the community centre, or the gym. Start your own hobby/interest group or host a movie or game night.

Attend campus events

https://www.algonquinsa.com/events/?start_date=2020-03&view=calendar

Explore campus clubs

<https://www.algonquinsa.com/campuslife/clubs-and-communities/>

Explore Pembroke and community activities

Pembroke Community Guide:

<https://www.pembroke.ca/download.php?dl=YToyOntzOjI6ImkljtzOjQ6IjM3MzMiO3M6Mzoia2V5IjtpOjE7fQ>

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/d/canada--pembroke/all-events/>

<https://www.pembroketoday.ca/pembroke-upcoming-events/#>

CHANGE WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Reaching out to others involves interpersonal risk and doesn't always go as planned. You need to consider alternate explanations for why that colleague says no, why no one interacts with you online, why your conversations with friends lack depth.

Limit comparisons to others about their social life and sense of connection and support. Social media in particular makes it seem like everyone is out together. You need to normalize how common feeling disconnected is and how challenging it is to build and strengthen relationships. You need to mitigate how you personalize these moments so they don't reinforce negative self-beliefs and promote further isolation.

Also put things into perspective: your situation is temporary.

TOLERATE YOUR LONELINESS

You might wish things were different, and loneliness is making you feel sad, but is this feeling tolerable? Can you accept that right now, for whatever reason, you may not have the social and personal connections you want in life? Is there a way to reframe this in terms of the value of having a lot of time to yourself, to focus on your own interests and passions or self-growth? Acceptance of your present circumstance, without judging it or wishing for it to be different, can help to lessen the feeling of distress that accompany loneliness.

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Focus on what you do have, socially and relationally. Consider what aspects of being with yourself you really appreciate. Anything you've always wanted to try or take up? Any activities like running, writing, or cooking? Try going for a walk or drive to explore the area, take yourself to a movie one afternoon, or research a topic you've always been interested in.