

# AN EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS



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## Introduction

Do you feel lonely sometimes?

Does modern life make us lonely?

Why/why not?

## Reading

Simon has chronic loneliness.

He has no friends, apart from one person who he might see once every two months or so. He lives far from his family and he has no social life.

“I have come to terms with the fact that I am alone and I that I hate being alone,” he says. “I suffer from loneliness and I feel like it’s killing me.”

Simon is one of millions of people that live every day all alone with little to no social contact. Loneliness is a serious problem these days, and it affects everyone no matter how old they are or what kind of person they are.

“At first, I used to think it was because of my job,” says Simon. “I am a freelance graphic designer and I work from home. I spend many hours staring at a computer and doing my design work. In a normal day, it is quite common for me to not talk to another living soul.”

This has affected Simon’s physical health as well as his mental wellbeing. He doesn’t eat very well and when he does eat he tends to eat unhealthy food. He drinks too much alcohol, and he

drinks alone. These are clear signs of deterioration that he needs to address.

A person who has a lot of experience dealing with loneliness is Dr Matthew Parks. He has this to say about loneliness in modern society.

"Make no mistake that loneliness is a killer. We are creatures of communication and social engagement. Without regular contact with other people, our health begins to suffer terribly.

For people like Simon, he must make the effort to go out and meet people. This is not something that can happen overnight. He must invest time and be patient, then he will find other like-minded people and he can build up a social network of his own.

"It's no use staying at home and feeling sorry for yourself," said Dr Parks. "You cannot expect the world to come knocking on your door. You have to join in other areas where you can meet people."

Dr Parks advises people to join clubs and meetings in their local area. Or to join an evening class.

"These are the kind of places where people meet," he says.

"This is where Simon needs to go. For example, if he has an interest in learning Japanese. He could attend a Japanese class

and he might meet one other person that has an interest in Japanese language and culture. That is how friendships begin. There has to be a common interest.”

What does Simon think of this advice?

“I have tried going to things like this,” he says. “I went to a club a few times but everyone else seemed to already know each other. I tried to get involved, but I felt excluded by the others. So I stopped going. No one missed me.”

## Reading Comprehension Questions

What is Simon's problem?

Does he have any friends at all?

Is Simon happy do you think? Why/why not?

Is loneliness common according to the article?

What kind of people suffer from loneliness?

What is Simon's job? Does this affect his life negatively?

How is Simon's health? What is the problem do you think?

According to Dr Parks, is loneliness dangerous?

What do people need in life according to Dr Parks?

What advice does Dr Parks have for Simon? Go into all the details.

What does Simon think of this advice?

Did he try any of this advice?

## Essential Vocabulary

chronic loneliness	social life
come to terms with	suffer
social contact	freelance
graphic designer	staring at
quite common	another living soul
physical health	mental well being
tends to	clear signs
deterioration	to address
modern society	make no mistake
a killer	creatures
communication	social engagement
happen overnight	invest
patient	like-minded
social network	feeling sorry for yourself
knocking on your door	common interest
involved	excluded

### Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.



Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Notebook**—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

***“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”***

## **Let's Meet!**

You are trying to organise some meetings and groups in your area to help people make friends and socialise.

In small groups, come up with three meeting or group ideas and say why these would be popular as a means for people to make friends.

**When you are ready, present your ideas to the class.**

## Discussion Questions

Do you ever get lonely sometimes? Why?

Do you think there are many people who get lonely in your city or town? Why?

How can we help lonely people? Or do they need to help themselves?

What do you think loneliness can do to people?

Do we lead lonely lives as we get older?

Is the internet making people more lonely? Why/why not?

Are some cultures more prone to loneliness than others? Why/why not?

Are intelligent people more lonely than less intelligent people? Why/why not?

Is it possible for some people to be happy even though they are all alone?

Is it a good idea to make friends online?

What is the difference between being alone and being lonely?

Is isolation the same as loneliness?

## Writing

You are the writer for an advice column in a magazine. You receive the following letter that is published in the magazine. You have to reply to it with great care and sensitivity.

*Hello,*

*I don't know what to do; I am all alone and I have no friends. I am very shy and insecure and I sometimes feel very nervous to talk to people I don't know.*

*But I am very lonely and I know that I need to meet people and make friends. I just don't know how to meet people and I can't go to places where there are large crowds.*

*What can I do?*

Write your reply and show your class and teacher.

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