



Looking for the Message in Loneliness

The last few years of off-and-on isolation due to the pandemic have precipitated an unprecedented rise in reports of loneliness.

But all loneliness isn't the same. Some forms of it, we crave. Some we can take action on and overcome. Other forms thought to be loneliness might need more urgent attention. The key is to look for the message it's trying to give us.

The Curious Thing About Loneliness

Loneliness is the feeling that we would like more connection, community and companionship than we think we have.

The curious thing about feeling lonely is that it has roots in a measurement. When we feel lonely, we are measuring the amount of social interaction we have against our ideal of desire for how much we would like to have. That "ideal" differs with each individual and can change over time.

We wish that the phone would ring with invitations from our friends. We want our weekends to include activities with people we like. We long for an intimate relationship that's loving, stimulating and fun. We'd rather not eat our meals alone. And when those things don't happen, we may feel lonely.

There are two important distinctions to make when talking about loneliness. The first is that loneliness is different from solitude. If you've ever craved "time to yourself," you know that being alone and enjoying your own company can be a restful, replenishing and even a creative or spiritual experience.

Loneliness, in contrast, doesn't "fill us up" the way solitude can. It drains us.

The second distinction is that feeling lonely is different from being depressed. Depression is an ongoing

state of feeling low and avoiding activity. While loneliness can certainly contribute to depression, feeling lonely once in a while is a normal part of being human. It usually ebbs and flows with what's going on in our lives, whereas depression doesn't pass as easily or quickly.

How to Feel Better as You Overcome Loneliness

When you're feeling lonely, here are some things you can do to comfort yourself:

- 1. Check-in with yourself.** Are you waiting for others to take action instead of doing so yourself? Are you worried about what might happen if you reached out, asked for support or made an invitation? As you explore what you're feeling underneath the loneliness, be gentle with yourself.
- 2. Reach out.** Do you have a friend you can call? You don't have to share how you're feeling; sometimes just talking with someone you care about and hearing how they are doing can lift your spirits. (Your reaching out will make them feel cared for, too!)
- 3. Make a move, make a stretch.** Do an activity that nourishes you, such as going for a walk, being in nature or snuggling your pet. Or stretch outside of your comfort zone but without overwhelming yourself. Accept an invitation that sounds fun. Find a book group or a cooking circle. Use your loneliness as an invitation to try something new and meet like-minded people you enjoy.

Loneliness is something we all experience from time to time. But it can also be a call to action, a message that we need more connection in our lives, and that the time has come to seek it out. ✧

10 Things to Let Go of in 2023

The start of a year always brings feelings of possibility and excitement for a new start. Here are 10 suggestions for things to change in 2023. Focus on one a month and see where you land by the end of the year.

- 1. Trying to please everyone.** It's just not possible, and the effort usually makes YOU displeased.
- 2. Fear of making a mistake.** Face it, you will. Do your best and no one can fault you.
- 3. Comparing yourself to others.** This is a destructive game you can never win. Refuse to engage in it.
- 4. Jumping to conclusions.** Think situations through before rendering judgment. Consider whether you know all of the facts.
- 5. Thinking you're always right.** Opening to other points of view can be a liberating experience.
- 6. Putting yourself down.** Modesty may be a virtue, but self-denigration does nothing but harm.
- 7. Overly focusing on the negative.** You don't have to be Pollyanna, but don't miss the good things in your life.
- 8. Fear of aging.** Medical advances, exercise, good nutrition and community raise our life expectancy and well-being.
- 9. Regret.** Learn the lessons of the past, then let your regrets go. Nothing is served by dwelling on them.
- 10. Despair.** No matter how unfortunate your circumstances, it is possible to improve them. Seek help and support. ✧

A Letter From *Red Chapin*



We all experience loneliness at various points in our lives, and for many of us, the pandemic brought this longing for more connection with others in spades. If you're feeling lonely, don't despair. The article on page 1 offers some ways for you to reach out and find the human connection you want.

Loneliness may have featured big in your childhood—and possibly due to experiences of abuse, neglect or lack of discipline. The effects of these experiences are passed down for generations. The page 3 article offers a path for healing from the impact of poor parenting, breaking that cycle for the future and loving yourself.

Asking for what you want and setting boundaries is one way to love yourself, and is an important life skill. But sometimes we're afraid that our assertions will alienate our friends and loved ones. The article on page 4 offers a way to get your needs met while enriching your relationships at the same time.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how well you rebut your inner judge, and the Top 10 suggests things to let go of in 2023 for a year of greater emotional freedom.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

How Well Do You Rebut Your Inner Judge?

Most of us have an internal "judge" that pronounces our behavior—even our very character—as bad, wrong, guilty. This constant self-judgment can lead to debilitating feelings of guilt, shame and anxiety. While it's difficult to silence this voice completely, there are ways to cope with it. Answer these true/false questions to discover how well you handle that judgy voice.



Set 1

True False

- 1. I can't seem to do anything right. I feel depressed and incapacitated by the constant nagging, judging voice inside me.
- 2. I don't necessarily realize I'm at the effect of my Judge, but I often compare myself to others and never quite measure up. I feel inadequate.
- 3. Just when I'm about to embark on something new and exciting, such as a job or relationship, my Judge kicks up doubt and fear to prevent me from pursuing the opportunity.
- 4. I have difficulty staying in the present moment because my internal judging voice loudly intrudes, dictating what I should and shouldn't do.
- 5. Because of that voice, I second-guess my choices and actions and don't trust myself. As a result, I worry that I'll make a big mistake and something bad will happen.

Set 2

- 1. I see my Judge as a misguided ally who wants to help or protect me. I look for the positive intention behind what it says and embrace that rather than the negative message.
- 2. I've gotten to know the themes my Judge harps on, so I can distinguish those voices from other more useful internal dialogue.
- 3. It's helpful to notice when my Judge is present. I breathe deeply and center myself to release fear and anxiety and return to a more peaceful place.
- 4. Giving my critical inner voices funny names and descriptions—such as Taskmonster or Paula Perfectionist—helps me diminish their power and not take them seriously.
- 5. As I've become skilled at handling the Judge, it bothers me less often. I still hear it sometimes, but I don't believe what it says and it rarely affects me adversely.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to learn some effective ways to handle your internal judge. Please call if you'd like support in exploring this further. ✨

How to Heal from Poor Parenting and Stop the Cycle

Many of society's ills, along with individual suffering, have at their roots parenting that is, at best, inadequate, at worst, abusive. That's because our parents are most often the primary influence in our lives. What we learn—or do *not* learn—from them when we're young can have lasting repercussions.

If not addressed, these effects—which include low self-esteem, being drawn into abusive or unfulfilling relationships, unhealthy addictions or inhibitions and poor coping skills—can overshadow productive and joyful expression throughout your lifetime.

Improper parenting can include physical, sexual and verbal abuse, excessive criticism, physical and emotional neglect, rejection, the favoring of one sibling over another, lack of discipline, forcing choices on children and being overly protective or indulgent.

Because we often parent as we were parented, it can be a challenge to give what you never received. That's why it's important to heal our own wounds and learn proper parenting techniques so that we don't perpetuate the cycle.

How, then, can we heal from improper parenting, thereby making ourselves whole, fulfilled members of society as well as loving, respectful and nurturing parents to the next generation?

First, it is important to understand that, as grown up as you may be, there is still a part of you that thinks, feels and reacts like a child. It is this tender and vulnerable part of you that needs to be recognized, heard, taught new behaviors, and given new choices.

Time alone does not heal childhood wounds. Healing requires focus and commitment, and a strong support system. Here are some steps you can take to learn how to nurture and heal the child within:

Feel your feelings. Allow and express whatever arises: grief, anger, resentment—it is all part of the healing process. You can be sure that *wonderful* new feelings will arise, too!

Identify and release beliefs and behaviors that no longer serve you. Through therapy, journaling or other supportive practices that facilitate self-discovery, explore the issues from childhood that continue to negatively impact you and block you from leading the life you want. Be willing to let go of unhelpful mental and emotional blocks.

Stop blaming others. We cannot thrive in the present if we are living in the past or blaming others for our problems and conflicts. Even though we could not control the early years of our life, it does not serve us to blame others for the choices and decisions we

made. Taking responsibility for our lives is a powerful step towards well-being.

Learn new strategies. The process of healing consists of learning self-honoring behaviors and discovering new choices. Experimenting with new behaviors may also include taking reasonable risks that build your confidence and self-esteem.

Share your story and get support. Support groups are an excellent way to have your story heard by others in a safe environment. It can be helpful to reach out to others who are suffering and can understand your pain and support you in your journey of becoming whole.

Learn to parent yourself. Healing from inadequate parenting requires, in a sense, going through the growing up process again. But this time you will be developing the "inner parent"—becoming (for yourself) the parent that you always needed. You learn to rely on yourself to give yourself what you need.

Embrace the recovery process. Whether you decide to seek professional therapy or learn coping techniques on your own, realize that the process will take time and effort on your part. Be patient with yourself and celebrate each new step of growth along the way.



Forgive. Forgiveness can be a controversial issue. Some regard it as necessary for healing; others say it is not. But what is important is that forgiveness frees *you*. Understanding the roots of your parents' behavior—and that they, too, probably received inadequate parenting—does not mean condoning it. Whether or not you forgive your parents, do forgive yourself for any past choices or behaviors you regret. Let go and move on. A *whole* new self is waiting for you.

When you begin to heal by giving to yourself what you needed—and didn't receive—as a child, you will begin to know yourself as a capable, valuable, lovable and loving person.

When we truly learn how to accept ourselves, we can pass that love and acceptance on to others. ✨

Strengthen Your Relationships by Being Assertive

Setting boundaries around what you don't want—and asking for what you do want—are important relationship skills. Here are four tips for developing your assertiveness in a way that will strengthen, deepen and enrich your relationships, and avoid causing friends and loved ones to shut down, get angry or feel resentful.

Get Clear on What You Want

Being assertive starts with knowing what you are—and aren't—willing to be, do, or have. For many of us, coming to this knowledge is a real task unto itself. Here, it may be useful to ask: "In an ideal world, what would I like to happen?" Focusing on an ideal outcome opens our minds, prevents us from falling into passivity or "victim-thinking," and helps us get really clear on what we want and don't want.

Set Boundaries But Stay Connected

Once you know what outcome you need (or want), share it with the other person. Pay attention to the

way stating your boundary feels in your body. With practice, you can actually sense when you're hitting the "sweet spot." It can feel really pleasurable, even exhilarating, to express your needs or desires out loud. Phrases like "such and such doesn't work for me" are simple ways of being assertive while maintaining connection.

State Your Needs and Desires

You can build your assertiveness the same way you build any muscle: exercise. Practice speaking up about your needs, big or small, on a daily basis. When you speak up about things that are less controversial—such as where to go to dinner, how to handle holiday gatherings or what movie to see—both you and your loved ones get used to your assertiveness. It becomes easier for you to



practice and for the other person to hear. Also, when bigger issues come along, you two will have a healthy process in place for dealing with differences in needs, and you'll have greater confidence in the resilience of your relationship.

Return the Favor

Assertiveness is a two-way street. If you want your boundaries to be respected, you must return the courtesy to your friends and loved ones. If she doesn't want you to use the bathroom when she's in the shower, don't. If he asks you to call before you come over, respect that. When it comes to following through on a person's reasonable request, actions really do speak louder than words.

If the other person isn't respecting your boundaries even though you've set them clearly, it may be time for professional help for you and/or your relationship. *

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