



MOOD DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA INC.

PROVINCIAL OFFICE: 100-4 FORT STREET WINNIPEG MANITOBA R3C 1C4
PHONE: (204) 786-0987 TOLL FREE (OUTSIDE OF WINNIPEG) 1 (800) 263-1460 FAX: (204) 775-3497
WEB: depression.mb.ca E-MAIL: sdmdm@depression.mb.ca

Coping With Loneliness

Source: Cathleen Henning,
Your Guide to Panic / Anxiety Disorders section, *About* website

Accepting it and moving on when the time is right

Loneliness may be painful and even frightening, and it may indicate a need for introspection. Have you been feeling lonely for a long time? Perhaps it's time to make some changes; it is possible to feel less alone. Loneliness is not a sign that you have failed or that you will never have people in your life. It may take effort to change the way you feel, but you can do it.

➤ **Accept it.** There are many steps you can take to help yourself feel less alone, but before you take those steps, stop and think about how you are feeling. Loneliness is an emotion, and as with other uncomfortable emotions, we often want to get rid of it as soon as possible. Sometimes, though, these kinds of emotions may be learning tools. Before rushing to eliminate loneliness, think about how you came to feel this way. Changes are most likely in order, but think about the changes that will suit your individual needs.

Sometimes, too, no change will eliminate loneliness. People may feel lonely even when surrounded by loving friends and family. Time may be the only solution. You are not flawed for feeling lonely, and if you accept the feeling, you will find that it is not as uncomfortable as you first thought.

Remember, too, that being alone and feeling lonely are not the same. If you are alone these days but enjoying it, then don't feel as if you must change because other people don't understand. Do, however, be sure that you have a support system and that you are available to friends and family.

➤ **Reach out.** If you had people to contact, you may be thinking, then you wouldn't be lonely. Sometimes, though, when we are immersed in loneliness, we may forget about all of our options. First, think about everyone you know and have ever known. Maybe you think a certain friend or relative wouldn't want to hear from you. Think again – you may be surprised. Try contacting them and see what happens next. Be sure, however, to have a list of possible contacts, just in case the first doesn't go as planned. Think of old friends, too. You don't even have to tell them you're contacting

them because you're lonely. Just reach out and communicate, and you'll start to feel

better. Second, if you truly believe friends and family aren't an option, then reach out to people you don't know. You're already on the Internet, and your options here are endless – from chat rooms to forums to games to pen pals.

➤ **Help someone else.** A great way to spend time with people and feel good about your contribution to the world is by volunteering. If your anxiety disorder is keeping you from volunteering in a traditional way, use your imagination. Even going into an online chat room and talking to someone else who is lonely is a significant way to help. If you are ready to volunteer outside your home, look to places that will be anxiety-friendly: church, hospitals, daycare or pre-schools, and nursing homes, are some examples.

➤ **Pursue your interests.** Meet people who like to do what you like to do by becoming involved in your hobbies and interests. If you already have a hobby, such as knitting, that tends to be solitary, look for local classes or groups where you can meet other people as well as learn more about your craft. If you've thought about an interest for a long time but have never followed through, consider starting now. Look at your local newspaper for classes, groups, and meetings if you need ideas. Take a nature walk. Attend a lecture at a local museum. Take a cooking class. If you're not sure what your interests are, just start participating until you find what you love.

➤ **Join – or start – a support group.** Look around for an anxiety disorder support group. Ask your therapist, check the local newspaper, and contact local hospitals. If there aren't any for anxiety, try a depression group. Consider starting your own support group if you can't find one; you'll be helping yourself and other people. If you need a place to have meetings, contact local churches, which often have space.

If you're not sure how to cope with your loneliness and you feel that it's making you depressed, talk to your therapist about it (or get a therapist if you don't have one). Talking about it may help you explore other issues or come up with unique ways to cope with your individual feelings.

“Recovery is a journey filled with hope.”