

Is your child lonely or socially isolated?



Children growing up in the digital world have many opportunities to feel connected. However, according to [recent research](#), children and adolescents are now lonelier than any other age group.

What is the difference between social isolation and feeling lonely? Social isolation is the absence of interactions with others (which may be what a child wants), while loneliness is when they aren't having the meaningful interactions they want. Even when children have a large group of friends, they can still experience feelings of loneliness.

What about kids who are introverts or want to be alone? It's completely healthy to want to be alone, but when a child spends the majority of their time in solitude, it may make it more difficult to form social bonds with their peers. Too much time alone can also lead to feelings of loneliness and depression.

What can cause loneliness in children and teens? Moving to a new town, state, changing schools, having conflict with friends or being bullied can all lead to loneliness. If children experience the death of a close friend or family member, their parents' divorce, or one of their siblings leaves home, they may also feel lonely. For teens, relationships change rapidly, and this push and pull and desire to compare themselves to others can lead to loneliness, too.

Is loneliness dangerous? It can be. Chronic loneliness can impact a child's physical health and their mental health. They may experience erratic sleep, aches and pains, negative thoughts, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations.

Your child may benefit from therapy if you answer “yes” to any of these questions:

- Is your (younger) child more clingy?
- Do they want you involved in their play often?
- Does your (younger) child have imaginary friends to fill the void of real friends?
- Does your child/teen have “school friends” but not friends outside of the school day?
- Has your child/ teen changed, been excluded, or bullied from their friend groups?
- What do their social circles look like at school?
- Does your child/teen seem sad, talk negatively about themselves or have low self-esteem?
- Does your child/teen spend long periods of time in their room?
- Does your child show signs of depression or social anxiety?

You may benefit from coaching if you:

- Want to help your child form friendships
- Are looking for ways to help your child when you see them being excluded
- Want to support a lonely child more effectively

DID YOU KNOW?

Children and teens are still learning coping skills to deal with emotions.

Teens may feel loneliness more intensely.

Supporting your kids

Here are some ways to support your child if you think they are lonely.

- Encourage them to get into a hobby, class, or recreational sport. Try to understand what your child enjoys, then find activities that align with these interests. This can help them foster new relationships by expanding their peer groups outside of school.
- Make more time for extended family. Cousins can make great friends.
- Limit social media. A 2018 study suggested that limiting the use of social media significantly reduced feelings of depression and loneliness.
- Talk to your child’s school. Find out if your school district offers any small-group social opportunities. Consider talking with your child’s teachers or school counselors about how they might help your child form more social bonds.



A Special-Needs Perspective:

While these talking points can apply to all children, children with special needs may face more challenges with social skills, communicating their feelings of loneliness, or controlling their impulses. All of these factors can make social connections more difficult.

- **Role model.** Help your child better understand the ins and outs of communication. Practice non-verbal body language, everyday conversation, how to ask questions and share information, and how to react and handle humor.
- **Groups for social skills.** Look to see if your community has an evidence-based social skills program, or if your school district offers any programs to help with these skills. This can be a great way for your child to make friends.
- **“Friendship Circle”.** Many schools and communities have “friendship circle” clubs with the specific intention to build connections with peers. If one doesn’t exist, ask how you can start one.
- **Develop a plan.** Help your child understand the steps to joining activities and making friends. Break down each step, practice, model the behavior for them, and set a goal. Make sure to practice and rehearse for when things don’t go as planned.



Get support

If your child is having a hard time with feelings of rejection, isolation, friendships, or loneliness, you might consider scheduling a therapy session for them. Coaching can help parents develop strategies for helping children handle their emotions, develop healthy behaviors, and help them form meaningful bonds. [Sign in](#) to schedule a session, or learn more about how Spring Health can support you: benefits@springhealth.