

# Coping With Loneliness: Tips for Seniors

On the old television show “The Golden Girls,” four, over-60 widows live together, providing each other companionship, friendship and emotional support. Many seniors, however, lack this kind of social network. In fact, loneliness is a serious problem among elderly people. Fortunately, loneliness can be overcome, although doing so takes some initiative. You might find the following strategies and tips helpful.

## **Make friends**

Make the effort to meet new people. At first, you may simply enjoy the companionship of a casual acquaintance. But over time, some of these relationships will grow into close friendships, the kind you can turn to for emotional support.

Your local senior center and area agency on aging are great resources, often organizing classes, outings and social functions for people who want to enjoy life with other seniors. Churches, health clubs, civic and service organizations, educational classes, travel clubs, and special interest groups are good places to meet people of all ages.

When you see an opportunity to introduce yourself, do so! Ask others about themselves and let people know something about you. Most people are happy to include newcomers, but growing new friendships requires ongoing contact.

Meanwhile, don't forget old friends and neighbors. Invite a friend with whom you've lost touch for lunch or organize a neighborhood get-together. Someone always has to take the initiative-it might as well be you.

## **Volunteer**

Volunteering your time and talents can help to put your own situation in perspective, bringing to light the positives and the things you can be thankful for. Check your local phone book under “volunteering” for organizations such as RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). You also can check with your local senior center, area agency on aging and hospital for volunteer opportunities.

## **Take up a hobby**

Hobbies can keep you motivated and forward-thinking. Through hobbies, you can set goals, like finding that rare stamp to add to your collection or knitting a stocking for your grandson’s first Christmas. Plus, many hobbies are possible if your mobility is challenged. Here are some ideas:

- gardening
- model trains
- arts and crafts
- needlepoint
- playing an instrument
- reading
- writing
- puzzles
- pen pals

## **Adopt a pet**

Most people don’t feel so alone in the company of a pet. Why? Pets love unconditionally, they are accepting, they don’t criticize, they don’t judge, they

forgive, and they give pleasure. Plus, caring for a pet can renew meaning and purpose in your life.

## **Reminisce**

Life review will help you recall the aspects of life and living that matter to you. Research shows that people who reminisce have enhanced emotional health and are less likely to be lonely or withdrawn.

## **If you are homebound**

Meeting people can be particularly difficult if you are homebound. Call your area agency on aging or place of worship to inquire about home-visitation services as well as community transportation for elderly people. You also can contact Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly, which serves lonely and isolated elderly in eight U.S. cities.

## **Look out for depression**

Loneliness can indicate depression, a disease causing mental and physical deterioration. Feelings of sadness and despair, loss of appetite, apathy, reluctance to make decisions, suicidal thoughts, and trouble sleeping are signs of depression and should be discussed with your health-care provider.