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Adjusting to Loneliness & Isolation  
Throughout The Pandemic

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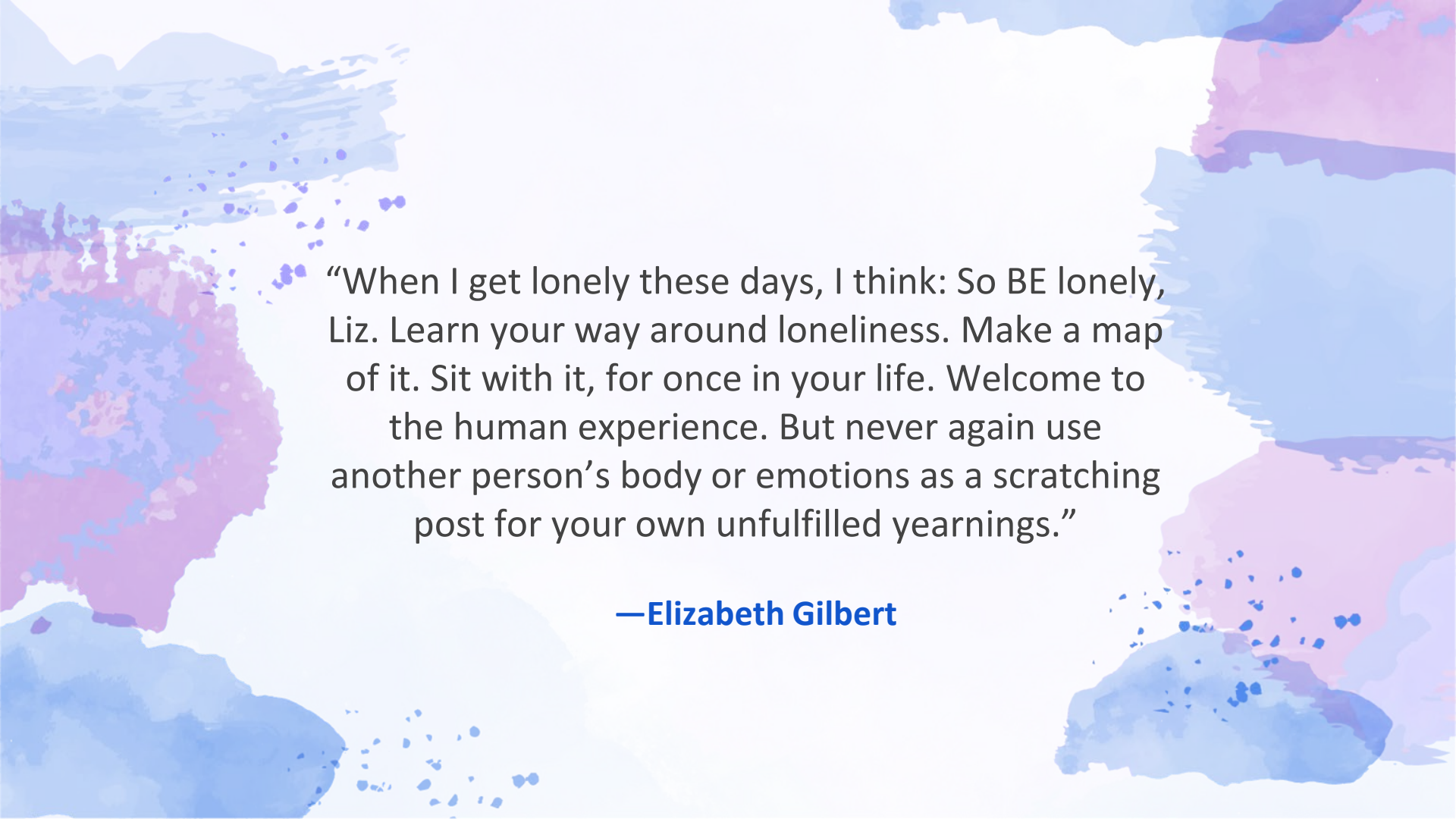
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“When I get lonely these days, I think: So BE lonely, Liz. Learn your way around loneliness. Make a map of it. Sit with it, for once in your life. Welcome to the human experience. But never again use another person’s body or emotions as a scratching post for your own unfulfilled yearnings.”

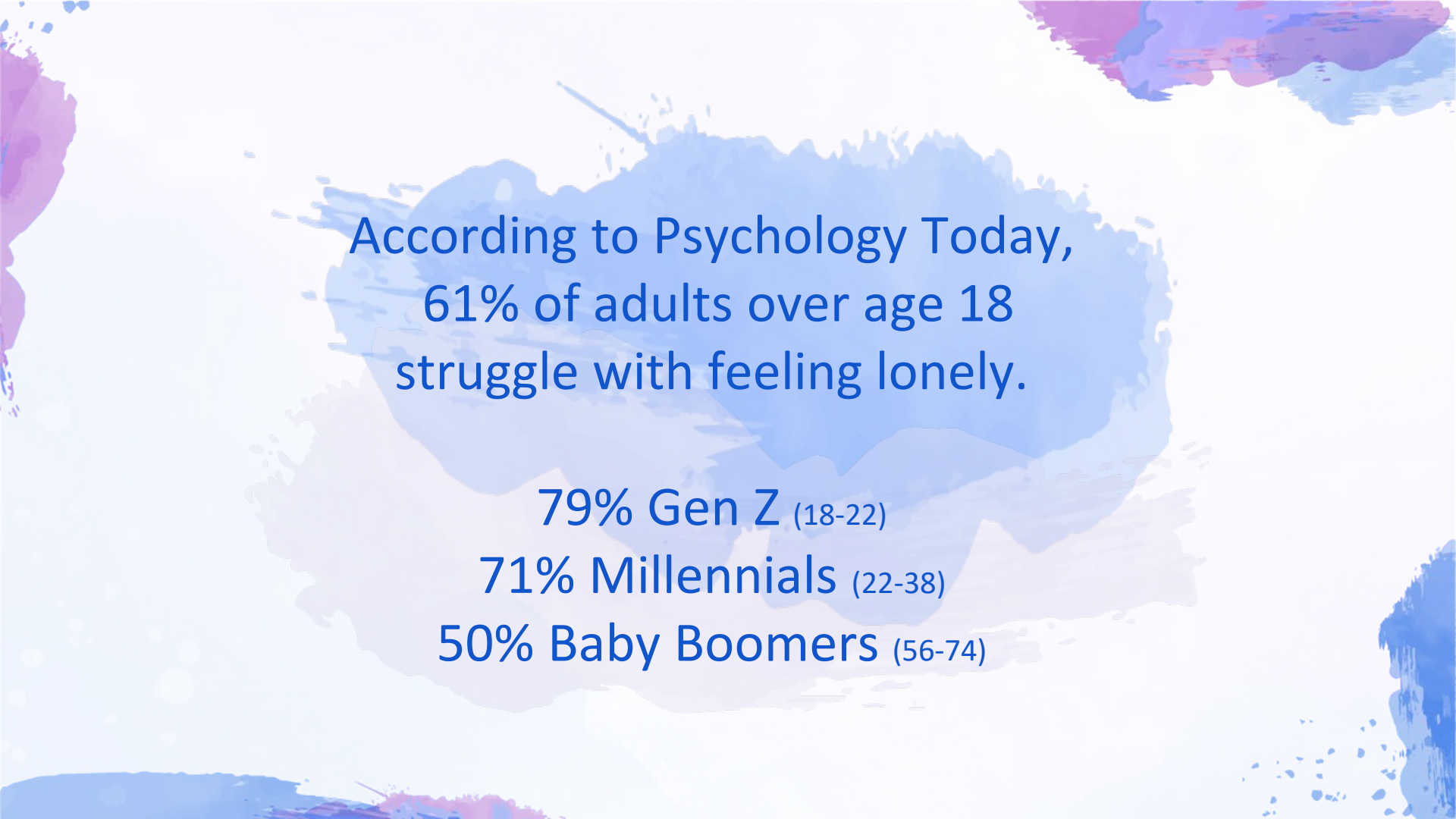
—Elizabeth Gilbert



01

# Adjusting to Loneliness and Isolation





According to Psychology Today,  
61% of adults over age 18  
struggle with feeling lonely.

79% Gen Z (18-22)

71% Millennials (22-38)

50% Baby Boomers (56-74)

# What is Loneliness?

Alienated

Abandoned

Misunderstood

Unloved

Empty

Left Out

Detached

Endless  
Wandering


Unwanted

Constricts the heart and cripples the  
body and mind



# What is Loneliness?

Psychology Today said “Loneliness is the state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one’s desire for social connection and actual experiences of it. Even some people who are surrounded by others throughout the day, or are in a long lasting marriage still experience a deep and pervasive loneliness”.

- The “fix” is not always about connections (more so if we view them as unhelpful or ambivalent)
  - Social stigma to loneliness, believe that it’s a short coming to experience it
  - When asked if someone is lonely, one may deny it; however, when asked if someone would like company, one might say yes
- 



# Effects Throughout The Pandemic

- The pandemic has caused a shift in normalcy and disrupted our routines
- Limited social interactions, gatherings, celebrations
- More effort is required to either retain current relationships, or establish new relationships
- Harder to identify if loneliness or something else is causing undesirable emotions / reactions
- It's possible to be lonely despite having an expansive network





# Populations With Increased Risk

- Caregivers
- Frontline workers - healthcare or first responders
- Food industry employees
- Those with existing illnesses, mental health conditions or substance use challenges
- Having lost a job, had hours or pay reduced or experienced other changes to employment
- Disabilities or developmental delays
- Socially isolated (living alone, or far away from others)
- Homelessness
- Racial and minority populations
- Toxicity within relationships



# Mental Health Impacts

- Increased suicidal ideation
- Depressive symptoms
- Substance abuse
- Diminished willpower
- Weakened health
- Decreased sleep quality



# Loneliness and The Brain

- Chronic loneliness may impact cognition
- Loneliness has been found to increase the risk of developing dementia by as much as 20%
- Psychological distress, (i.e. negative thinking) and loneliness can trigger the biological stress response



# Social Isolation Research

- Harry Harlow 1950's study on monkeys in isolation
  - Baby monkeys were placed in a “pit of despair” - metal container where they couldn't climb out. They experienced months of isolation which resulted in exhibited mental distress and depression
  - Those in partial isolation (not able to form connections with peers) became aggressive and hostile
  - Monkeys in steel chambers for either 3, 6 or 12 months without any peer or human contact was described as having “devastating” and “debilitating” reactions
- Solitary Confinement – 22 hours(+) without meaningful human contact
  - Not uncommon to spend months (+) in SC
  - In 2014, it was estimated that out of 80,000 - 100,000 inmates, 1/3 were actively psychotic and/or acutely suicidal
  - Social isolation and social confinement can cause a “specific psychiatric syndrome, characterized by hallucinations; panic attacks; overt paranoia; diminished impulse control; hypersensitivity to external stimuli; and difficulties with thinking, concentration and memory”

# Managing Our Inner Critic


- The pandemic has allowed more time for thinking which can enhance the volume on our inner critical voice
  - Similar to trying to fall asleep (racing thoughts, replaying the day or interactions, identifying tasks to complete, and/or experiencing trauma reminders)
- Our voice fuels criticism and can undermine us to make us feel insecure or unwanted
  - You're pathetic, a mess, useless, a burden, you should deal with this on your own
- Notice when these thoughts occur? What actions might they inspire?





# Managing Our Inner Critic, Cont.

- Change our thought to the second person:
  - I am stupid vs. you are stupid (depersonalizes it)
- Counter the thought:
  - Where is the evidence?
- Explore any behaviors we are trying to avoid?
  - i.e. one more drink won't hurt, you don't need to exercise, don't bother getting out of bed



Can we identify a growth opportunity from our loneliness experience?



02

## Healthy Coping

# Academic Connections

- Take advantage of office hours – they may lead to connections with internships or jobs
- Knowledge sharing can be powerful
- Attend events that are suggested by your professors and educators



# Get Social

- Reach out to friends or family through phone calls, social media or email
- Nurture current/new relationships
- Confide in those you trust and share *how you're actually feeling*
- Take part in virtual and/or in-person support groups
- Utilize counseling services
- Create shared goals with others through cooking, hobbies, exercise – checking in with colleagues, friends or family can be helpful and facilitate a sense of achievement
- Spend time in nature, enjoying fresh air and sunlight when possible

\*Don't interpret it as a failure if you don't leave this year with a new \_\_\_\_\_ (insert something flashy)



# Practice Good Sleep Hygiene

- Go to bed at similar times each night
- Remove technology after a certain time
- Engage in mindfulness or meditation
- Shower metaphor



# Sitting with Our Emotions

Do:

- Acknowledge the emotion and the reality of the situation, thoughts of loneliness are normal
- Listen to the message of the emotion without judgement
- Feel the physical sensation of the emotion

Don't:

- React immediately
- Label the emotion as good or bad
- Push the emotion away
- Tell yourself to “suck it up”
- Confuse your feelings for facts
- Assume you will always feel this way



# Sit with Our Emotions, Cont.

*Tara Brach* – Clinical Psychologist and teacher of mindfulness and meditation

## (RAIN)

- Recognize: What is happening
- Accept: Allow the experience to be there, just as it is
- Investigate: With interest and care
- Nurture: With self-compassion

# Engage in Gratitude

- Focus on moments of light and joy
- Retrain your brain to pay attention to what you're grateful for: Identify 3-5 things
- Think about what you are able to experience, versus what you are missing out on?
- Participate in regular relaxation with journaling, meditation and/or mindfulness



# Health & Movement

- World Health Organization reports social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Can drive up cortisol levels, which is elevated when our body experiences stress
- Can increase your risk for exhaustion, depression, heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes , sleep disorders, shorter life span and decreased immunity
- Strive for healthy lifestyle choices (movement and fueling your body with nourishing foods)
- Take advantage of activities where you feel comfortable. Aim for engaging in cardio activity for at least 30 minutes (x3) weekly



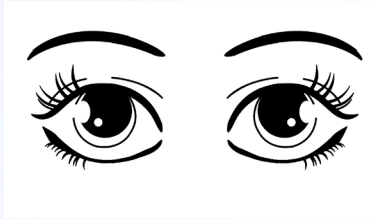
# Other Coping Strategies

- Breathing Exercises
- Meditating
- Journaling (topic specific, free association)
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Movement
- Laughter
- Connection with others (games, etc.)
- Managing your time
- Avoiding self-medication: Alcohol, drugs, avoidance and risky behaviors



# Grounding with Our 5 Senses

See



Hear



Touch



Smell



Taste



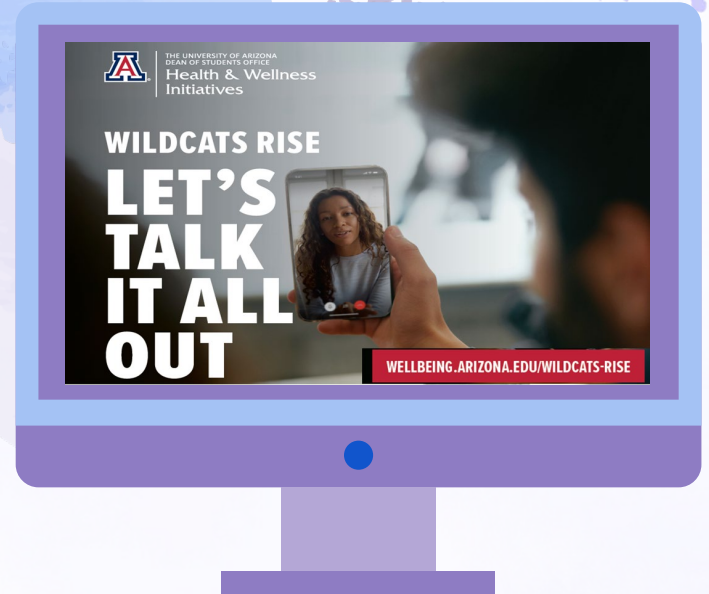


03

Resources

# Wildcats Rise

- RISE = Resilience in Stressful Events
- Peer-to-peer program that offers Psychological First Aid (PFA)
- Not psychological treatment (not group therapy)
- Supportive outlet to share stressors and discuss healthy coping strategies
- Offered via Zoom for both undergraduate & graduate students
- Individual peer support consults (x3 - 20 min sessions)
- Group peer support consults - No limit for the number of sessions



# UA Mental Health Resources

- CAPS– Counseling & Psychological Services
- Life Management Counseling (LMC)
- The SALT Center Psychological & Wellness Services
- College of Medicine Mental Health Services
- Psychology Department Behavioral Health Clinic
- C.A.T.S Clinical and Sport Psychology Services



# UA Wellness Resources

- *Behavioral Sleep Medicine Clinic*: <https://psychiatry.arizona.edu/patient-care/behavioral-sleep-medicine-clinic>
- *Nutrition*: <https://health.arizona.edu/nutrition>
- *Pathway to Wellness*: <https://health.arizona.edu/pathwaystowellness>
- *Sleep*: <https://health.arizona.edu/sleep>
- *Sexual Health*: <https://health.arizona.edu/sexual-health>
- *Stronger Than*: <https://health.arizona.edu/strongerthan>
- *Take Charge of Your Well-Being*: <https://health.arizona.edu/take-charge-your-well-being-2020>

# Local & National Mental Health Resources

- National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 1-888-628-9454 (En Español)
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273 (Talk) Press 1 or text 838255
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- Crisis Response Center (520) 301-2400 – 2802 E District St
- Community Wide Crisis Line: (520) 622-6000
- WARM line: (520) 770-9909

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04

## Journal Activity

# Journal Activity

How are you feeling right now?

Emotional Difficulties:

My Feeling	How It Serves Me	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protects me from failure</li></ul> Makes people leave me alone	Depression serves to express my grief	Limits my experiences  Can be overwhelming, yet comforting

# Journal Activity, Cont.

Choose three fixed beliefs that are negative? (*I'm not good enough*)

Choose three truths to challenge those negative fixed beliefs? (*I am enough*)

What are you proud of?

When do you feel your best?

Identify three things you are grateful for?

What do you need to say no to?

What do you need to say yes to? (*New experiences*)

What do you need to let go off that is no longer serving you?



# Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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