



Fort Hays State University – Health and Wellness Services

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Loneliness

Coming to college usually involves a lot of change in lifestyle, study patterns, and independence. The accumulated effect can be disorientating and make you feel uncertain of what to do or how to be with others. Social insecurity can then creep in, even if you normally feel quite socially adept.

Loneliness can be common at college for a variety of reasons:

- You may miss friends and family—maybe this is the first time you have been away from them.
- It may be the first time in many years when you have had to “start from scratch” in making new friends.
- You may have been lonely before you came to college and hoped that things would be different here.
- You may be missing old friends and find it hard to replace them, or you may feel reluctant to engage with new people.
- You may be preoccupied with issues that make it hard to be as sociable as you would like.
- You may have a long-distance relationship and feel torn between life here and elsewhere.
- You may be anxious about college work and feel conflicted about spending time on social activities.
- You may feel like you don’t belong at FHSU.

Loneliness can lead you to feeling socially inadequate, unlikeable, uncomfortable in the company of others, or angry and critical of other people. Feeling burdened by loneliness can be draining and undermine your self-esteem. All of this can make it harder to take part in social activities or to take care of yourself by doing the things you normally enjoy.

What You Can Do

Most of us experience feelings of loneliness at times. It can feel like you are the only one in that situation. Remember, others might be putting on a brave face and be experiencing similar feelings to the ones you struggle with. The pain you feel is a normal reaction because social contact is such a basic human need.

Here are some things that might help:

- Take care of yourself. Some of us take longer to settle in socially to a new environment.
- Try to say hello or even just smile at people you pass in the hallway, other places at college, or at your workplace. This can make it easier to strike up a conversation later.
- Make plans to get together with someone. It can feel unfair if you are having to make all the effort in planning to do something, but it may be the only way to initiate having more fulfilling social relationships.
- Try activities that you enjoy, as well as new ones, both for the experience and to widen the opportunities for social contact. You don’t have to stick with an activity if you find you don’t like it, but try to give new things a chance. Initial experiences don’t always meet our expectations, but they can change over time. Pace yourself. You don’t have to try everything at once—doing so might leave you feeling overstretched. If your early time at FHSU did not go well, there is still time to get involved.
- If there isn’t a group or organization related to your passion, why not start one? It may seem like a bold step, but it might be easier than you think. Plus, having a project can also reduce your loneliness.
- Try going online to connect with others. This can feel like a less challenging way to reduce your loneliness, but balancing it with face-to-face experiences is likely to be even more rewarding.
- Keep doing the things you really enjoy like going to movies or events, even if there is no one to go with.
- Do things for other people. It can make us feel good about ourselves and can reduce loneliness, as well as help build relationships.
- Remember, some of us are more at ease in groups and others of us are more at ease in one-to-one situations. Notice your own preference and “style” and play to your own strengths.