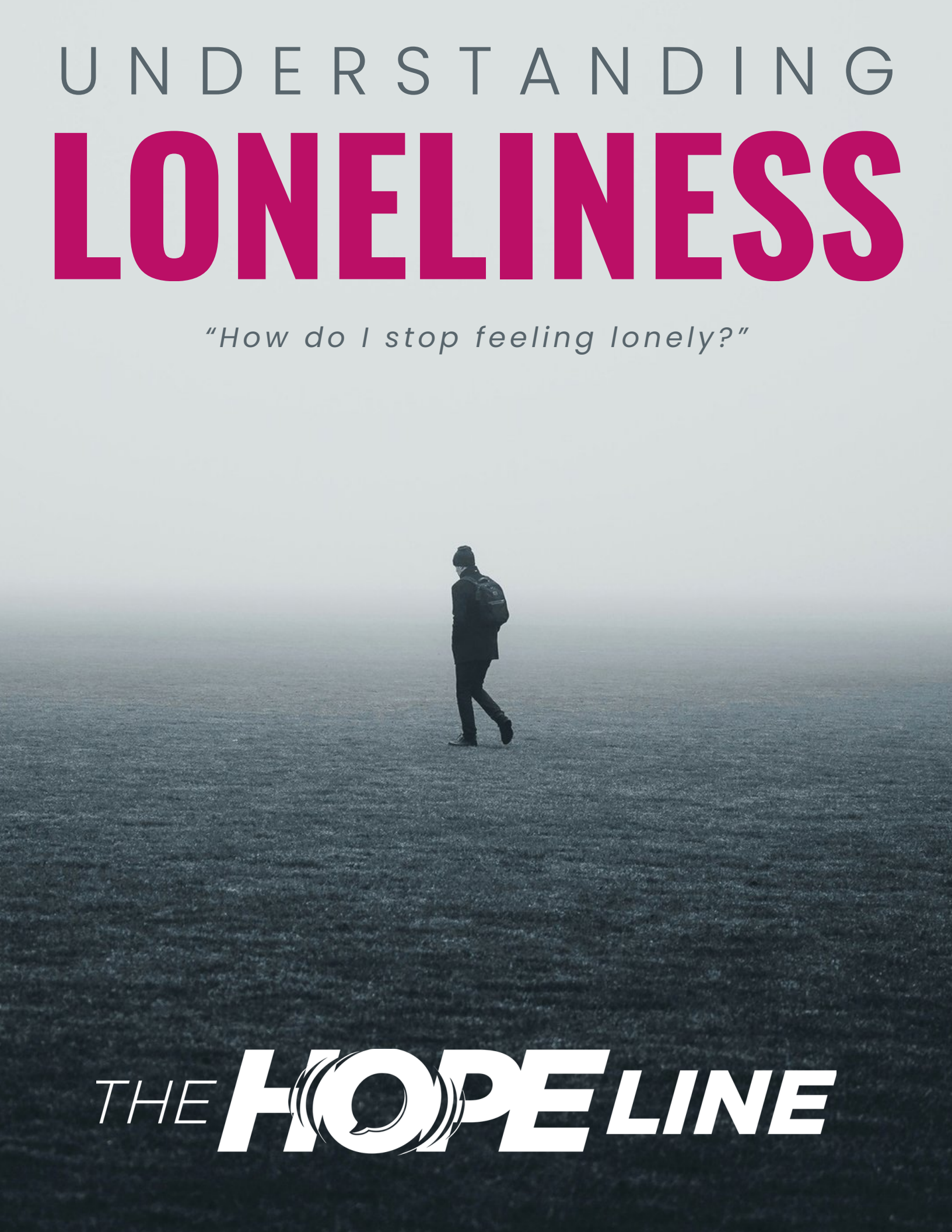
UNDERSTANDING

LONELINESS

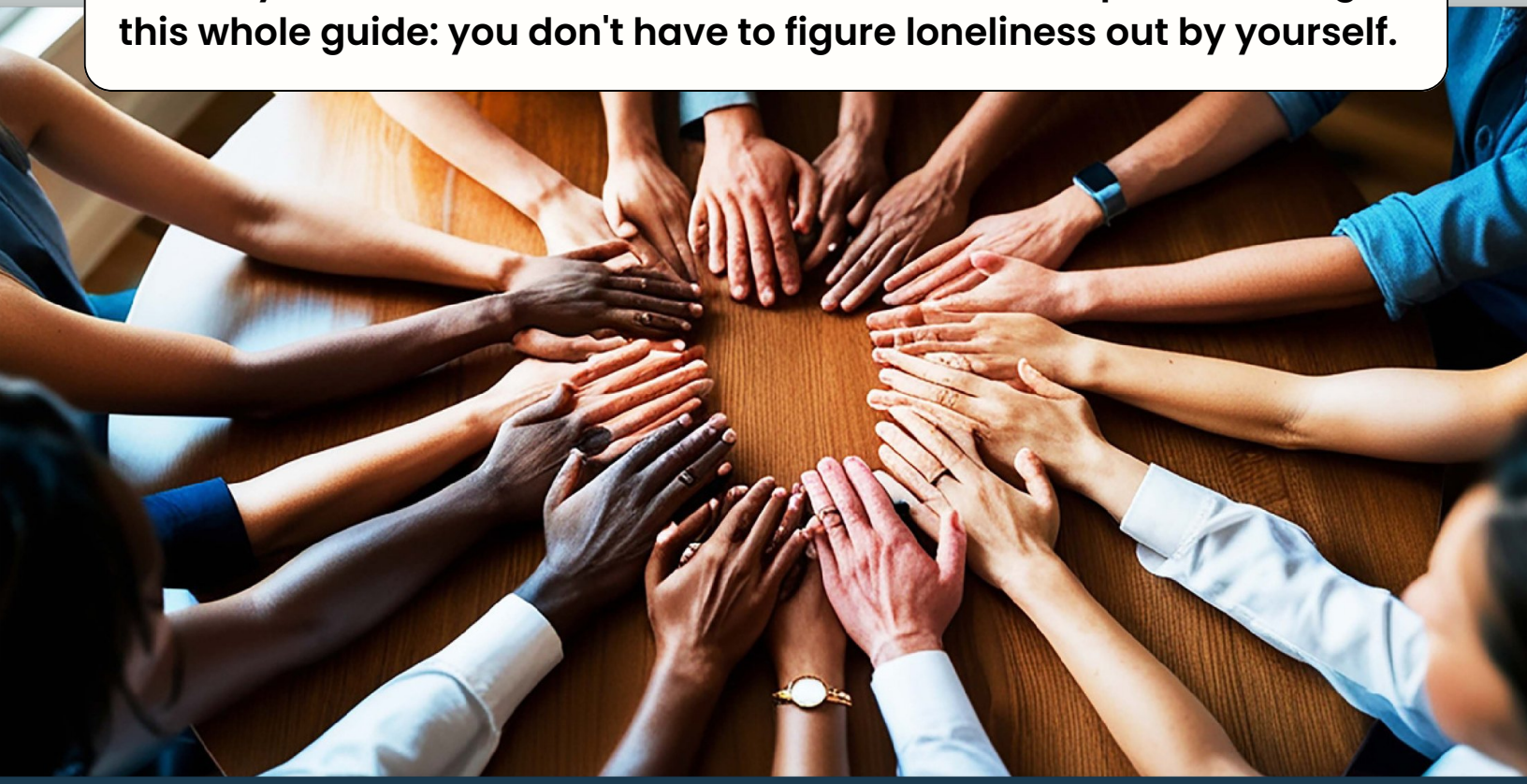
"How do I stop feeling lonely?"



THE HOPELINE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE

Before you read another word, here's the most important thing in this whole guide: you don't have to figure loneliness out by yourself.



Chat with a Hope Coach!

If today feels heavy, you can talk it through with a Hope Coach right now. It's free, it's confidential, and someone's here 24 hours a day. Chat live with a Hope Coach at **thehopeline.com/chat-live**

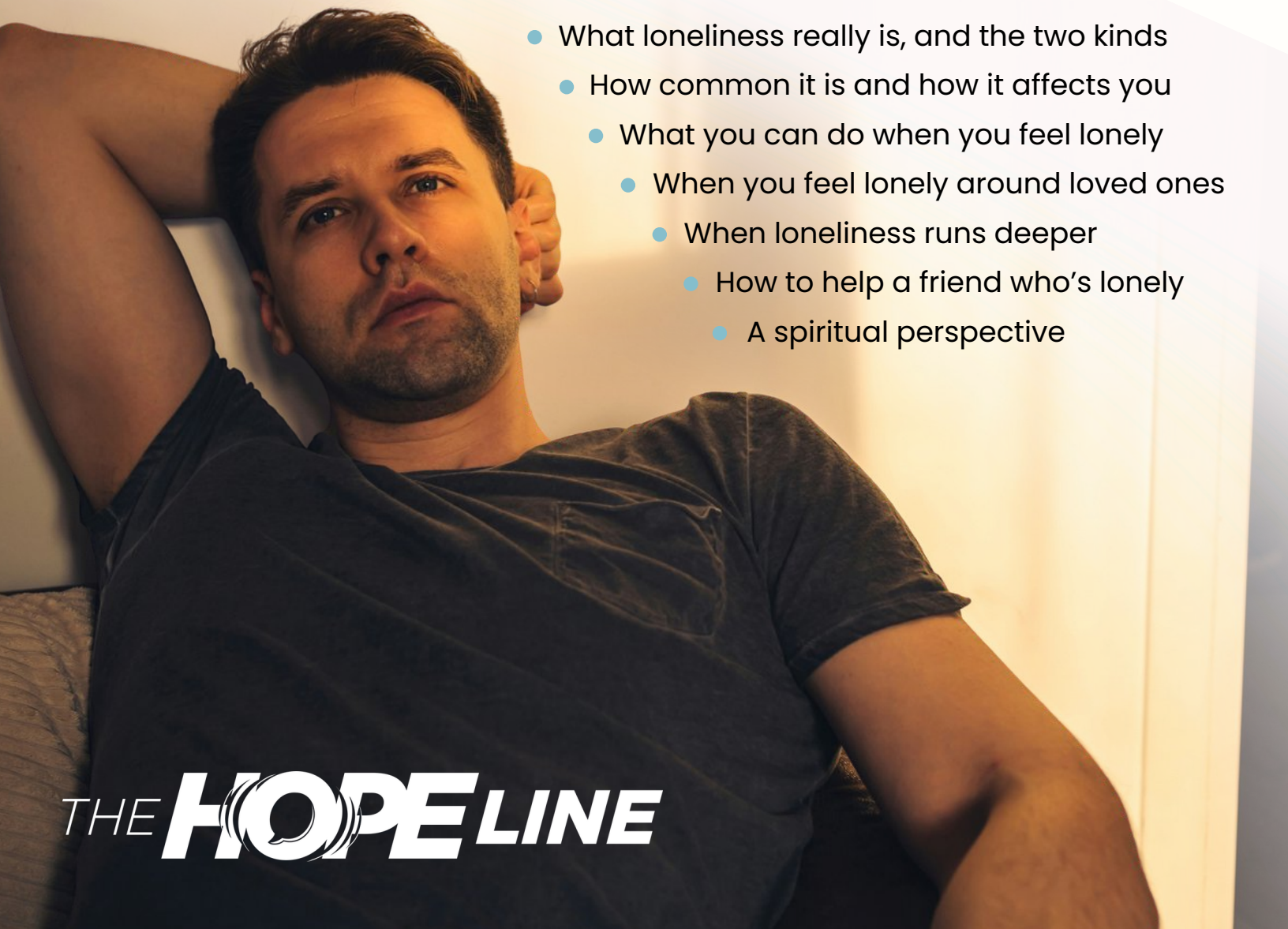
Are You *LONELY?*

If you are, you're in bigger company than it feels like. A lot of people feel unseen, unheard, like nobody really gets them, even in a room full of people. Feeling lonely for a season is a normal part of being human. It usually shows up around change: a new city, a new school or job, losing someone you love, a friend group that drifted.

What helps is reaching toward connection before loneliness settles in for the long haul. We're wired for community: people we can be honest with, a place we belong, folks who have our back and let us have theirs. When that's missing for a while, it hurts. And loneliness can set in. There are real steps that can help loneliness lift, and this guide walks through them.

Here's What's Inside

- What loneliness really is, and the two kinds
- How common it is and how it affects you
- What you can do when you feel lonely
- When you feel lonely around loved ones
- When loneliness runs deeper
- How to help a friend who's lonely
- A spiritual perspective



THE HOPE LINE

What *LONELINESS* Really Is

You can be surrounded by people and still feel it. It isn't a headcount of who's around you. It's the gap between the connection you have and the connection you're longing for. That's why you can feel lonely in a crowd, inside a friend group, even at home.



THERE ARE 2 KINDS WORTH KNOWING

Situational Loneliness	Chronic Loneliness
This kind shows up for a season, usually after something changes: a move, a breakup, a new school or job, a crowd that isn't your people, a stretch with no one you're dating. It's real, and it tends to lift as you find your footing and build new relationships.	This is the kind that lingers with no end in sight, when you're missing steady, trusted connection with anyone you can fully be yourself with. If that's where you are, it doesn't mean something's wrong with you. It's worth taking seriously and worth reaching out about, rather than waiting it out alone.

Here's something to watch for: situational loneliness over time can harden into the chronic kind. Sometimes you start feeling embarrassed about being lonely, decide it says something bad about you, and pull back from new people right when reaching out would help most. Guy Winch, PhD, describes what loneliness does to our thinking:

> *"Loneliness creates a deep psychological wound that distorts our perceptions and scrambles our thinking. It makes us think that those around us care much less than they actually do. It also makes us afraid to reach out because we don't want to set ourselves up for rejection and heartache when our heart is already aching."*
>
> ***- Guy Winch, PhD, psychologist and author***

Seeing that distortion for what it is can help you move past it. The people around you very likely care more than loneliness is telling you they do.

How *COMMON* Is Loneliness, and What Does It Do?

If loneliness makes you feel like the odd one out, the numbers tell a different story.

How Common Is It?

- **About half of U.S. adults say they've felt lonely.** It's one of the most common things people carry, and most of them are carrying it quietly.
- **Young adults report some of the highest rates of anyone.** If you're a teenager or in your twenties and you feel this, you're not the exception. You're closer to the middle of the crowd than it seems.
- **A lot of people who feel lonely never say so out loud,** which is part of what makes it feel so isolating. You could be sitting right next to someone feeling the exact same way.





What does it do to you?

Loneliness that sticks around for a long time is linked to real effects on how we feel and how our bodies hold up. **Researchers connect long-term loneliness with higher rates of depression, anxiety, trouble sleeping, and stress on the heart.**

Here's the hopeful part: connection works the other way too. Reaching toward people, even in small ways, is linked to better mood, better sleep, and better health over time. Loneliness can shift, and the steps in this guide are where that shift starts.

And any time it feels like too much to carry alone, a Hope Coach is one message away at thehopeline.com/chat-live.

What You Can Do When You Feel *LONELY*

When loneliness is heavy, the bravest and most useful thing you can do is tell someone. A Hope Coach will listen any time at thehopeline.com/chat-live. Alongside that, here are things that help, day to day.



REMEMBER: YOU'RE NOT UNUSUAL.

About half of people know this feeling. That doesn't make it hurt less, but you're not broken and you're not the only one.



NOTICE THE STORY LONELINESS TELLS.

It likes to say things like 'I'll always be alone' or 'something's wrong with me.' Write those thoughts down, then answer them honestly. You're not on a deserted island; you'll cross paths with people at school, at work, in line, wherever you go. Being alone is a situation, and situations change.

LET THE FEELING POINT YOU SOMEWHERE.

Loneliness is a signal that connection matters to you. Let it nudge you toward people instead of away from them.





USE YOUR OWN TIME WELL.

Alone time doesn't have to be lonely time. Pour it into something you enjoy and want to get good at: reading, cooking, music, a sport. A new skill can even become the reason you meet people, through a group or a simple conversation starter.

TAKE THE FIRST SMALL STEP, AND KEEP IT STEADY.

Loneliness can become a habit, and habits shift when you act against them. Invite someone to hang out. Start the conversation. Then build a small, regular touchpoint: a standing lunch, a weekly game, a text you always send. Consistency is what turns strangers into friends.





COME BACK TO THE OFFLINE WORLD.

Screens can feel like connection while leaving you emptier. Trade some scroll time for a real face: a call, a coffee, time with someone in the room and both phones down.

WATCH FOR THE DOORS PEOPLE OPEN.

When you're deep in loneliness, it's easy to miss the small signals that someone's glad you're there or open to being friends. Look up and look for them. They're often there.





KEEP ALL YOUR PEOPLE. NOT JUST ONE.

When you fall for someone or get busy with one person, it's easy to let friends and family drift, and that quietly breeds loneliness later. Keep those relationships watered. And keep your expectations kind, too: a friend won't text constantly or share every detail, and that's okay. A friendship isn't failing just because it can't give you everything at once.

TURN YOURSELF OUTWARD

When you're able, look for a way to help or encourage someone else. Shifting the focus from how bad it feels to how you can be good to somebody often lightens the weight.





HOLD ONTO YOUR WORTH

Loneliness can tempt you to lower your standards in who you date or who you get close to just to avoid being alone. You're worth more than that, and the right people are worth the wait.



"We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, and intellectually. We need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves."

- C.S. Lewis

When You Feel Lonely Around People Who Love You

Some of the most confusing loneliness happens when you're not actually alone. You can have a family, a best friend, a person you're dating, and still feel unseen. Being near someone isn't the same as feeling close to them, and that gap can ache even more because you expected more.

It often starts quietly. Conversations shrink down to logistics, who's picking up what, what time you're leaving. You stop really talking, stop doing things together, drift into the same house or the same group chat while feeling miles apart.

The good news is that closeness can be rebuilt, and usually with smaller moves than you'd think.



- **START WITHOUT BLAME.** Skip “whose fault is this’ and ask instead, ”what's making me feel far away, and what's one thing that could help?”
- **LET GO OF OLD HURT.** Held-onto resentment is one of the loneliest things there is. Choosing to forgive makes room for connection to come back.
- **RECONNECT ON PURPOSE.** Ask the people you love a real question, something they actually care about, and truly listen. Do one small thing together: a show, a meal, a walk. When you're together, set the distractions down and let them see they have your attention.
- **GIVE IT A LITTLE TIME.** You're stretching muscles that haven't been used in a while, so don't expect it all at once. Small, consistent warmth is what brings people back into focus.



When Loneliness Runs *DEEPER*

For some people, loneliness has deeper roots, and naming them is the first step toward real help. **See if any of these sound familiar.**

Fear of being judged.

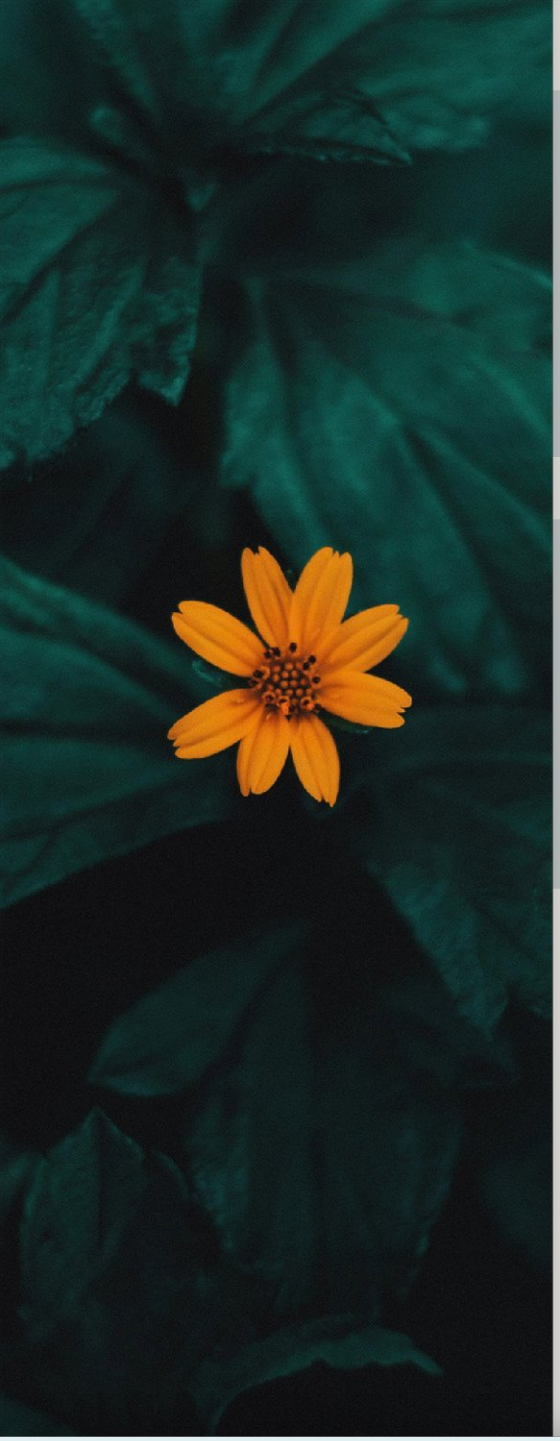
Some people feel real fear in social situations, sure they'll embarrass themselves or be picked apart. So they stay away, and staying away makes the next time harder. This can be social anxiety, and it's something people get real help for.

Depression.

Depression can feed loneliness from both sides. It can drain the energy it takes to reach out, and it can pull your mood so low that others don't know how to come close. It's real, and it's worth getting support for.

A shaken sense of self worth.

Sometimes a string of hard experiences leaves you feeling beaten down and sure you'll just get hurt again, so you stop putting yourself out there.



A tender heart.

Some people simply feel things more deeply. They're easily hurt when someone's careless or short on time, and they take it hard, so they retreat to where it feels safe.

Never learning the ropes.

Some people never got the chance to learn how friendships start and keep going, maybe home life was isolated, and now the give-and-take of connecting feels foreign.

If you recognize yourself here, start by being gentle with yourself. These are exactly the kinds of things people get real help for. Talking with a counselor or therapist is a strong step in the right direction, especially for anxiety, depression, or old pain that's worn down how you see yourself.

A Hope Coach is a great place to start, too. They'll listen, and if you'd be better served by professional support, they'll help point you there. You don't have to sort out which kind of help you need before you reach out; you just have to reach out. Start any time at thehopeline.com/chat-live.

You can also keep learning with our [guides on Anxiety, Depression, and Self-Worth.]

How to *HELP A FRIEND* Who is Lonely

If you know someone who's lonely, you don't need the perfect words. Showing up is most of it. A few simple things that make a real difference:

Reach out for real. A call lands differently than a text. Hearing a voice reminds someone they matter.

Try again if they go quiet. If you leave a message and don't hear back, reach out again. Loneliness can make people assume they're a bother; your second try tells them they're not.

Keep it low-key. Invite them to something easy and pressure-free: a walk, a coffee, a movie. Small and comfortable beats big and overwhelming.

Take their feelings seriously. Don't brush off or make light of what they're feeling. Just letting them be heard is a gift.

Pass this guide along. Sometimes the kindest thing is simply, 'this made me think of you.'

Never underestimate a small moment of connection: a real 'hey, how are you,' a genuine question to a coworker, a neighbor, a classmate. That one moment can be the thing that turns someone's day.

"If [a lonely person] is able to make one more friend, the loneliness starts to diminish. All sorts of scary things become possible when you have a friend to do them with."

— Jacqueline Olds, MD, co-author of The Lonely American



A Spiritual Perspective

God made us for each other. To love, to look out for one another, to show up. Scripture puts it plainly:

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Practice hospitality. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another." (Romans 12:10–15)

So when that kind of community is missing for a season and loneliness sets in, it helps to remember a deeper truth: you are never truly alone. God promises to never leave you (Deuteronomy 31:6) and to hold you up, strengthen you, and help you (Isaiah 41:10). In a lonely stretch, lean on Him. Talk to Him honestly in prayer, spend time in the Bible, and make room for His presence.

Loneliness has a way of whispering lies, that you don't matter, that nothing will change, that you'll always feel this way. Those lies aren't the truth about you, and they aren't from God. Jesus said:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

God offers REAL HOPE:
"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)



Talk with someone about your questions

If you want to know more about what it means to have a relationship with God or have questions about the topic of loneliness, our Hope Coaches are available 24/7 to chat with you about whatever is on your mind.

← CHAT LIVE WITH A HOPE COACH

THE HOPE LINE

Our mission is to help students and young adults in crisis by offering sound advice and a safe place to connect. Through our online resources and the ability to chat live with a Hope Coach 24/7, we are here to help people make a true connection.

Founded by Dawson McAllister in 1991, TheHopeLine is a 100% donor funded ministry. If you would like to learn more about partnering with us, visit **thehopeline.com/partners-in-hope**.

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