

# The Loneliness Epidemic and Its Implications for Teaching

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Feeling lonely at college, especially as a first year or transfer student, is nothing new. But research shows that we are experiencing an “epidemic of loneliness” (Cacioppo, 2009), with at least a third of U.S. adults being lonely (e.g., Cigna, 2018). In this PIE, we will talk about the loneliness epidemic and its implications for teaching.

## Questions

1. How has the loneliness epidemic impacted your students? Do you think they struggle with feelings of social disconnection?
2. Should instructors be concerned with students’ social health? Should we reconsider our course policies, design, and content in light of the loneliness epidemic? How can we use (or prohibit) technology in the classroom to foster connections among students?
3. One-third of instructional faculty at my university report sometimes or often feeling alone. Is loneliness a problem at your university, too? What are the downstream consequences of faculty feeling like “an island?”

## Recommended Reading

Cacioppo, J.T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human nature and the need for social connection*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Gallagher, K.M., & Stocker, S. L. (2018). A guide to incorporating social-emotional learning into the college classroom: Busting anxiety, boosting ability. Retrieved from: <https://teachpsych.org/resources/Documents/otrp/resources/Gallagher%20and%20Stocker%20SEL%20Manual%20-%20FULL.pdf>

Murthy, V. (2017). Work and the loneliness epidemic: Reducing isolation at work is good for business. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/cover-story/2017/09/work-and-the-loneliness-epidemic>.

Saville, B.K, Lawrence, N.K., & Jakobsen, K.V. (2012). Creating learning communities in the classroom. In K. Buch & K.E. Barron (Eds.). *Discipline-centered learning communities: Creating connections among students and faculty within a major*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Whittington, B. L. (2019). Benefits of a Voluntary Cell Phone Abstinence Intervention in General Psychology Courses. *Teaching of Psychology*, 46(4), 299-305.

Want to continue the conversation? Email me at [kerrna@jmu.edu](mailto:kerrna@jmu.edu).