



EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

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Social connections, the relationships and interactions we have with friends, family, and members of the larger community, are as crucial to our survival and ability to thrive as food and water. According to a 2023 [Surgeon General's advisory](#), the United States is experiencing an epidemic of loneliness and social isolation. Distress due to feelings of isolation and lack of relationships can result in harms that include early death, poor mental health, and lack of economic stability. Conversely, increasing social connection has healing effects, and builds resilience by increasing access to resources and informal supports for individuals, families and even communities.

Social connections provide much needed emotional and practical support necessary to build upon five specific strengths that foster the health and well-being of children and families. Research has identified these five strengths as essential ingredients for building family capacity to promote optimal development of their children and enhance their ability to weather hardship. Social connection is one of these strengths and interacts with the other four strengths to augment the benefit to children and families.

Feelings Matter - Children learn about their own and other's feelings through relationships, first, from their primary caregivers and immediate family and, later, from peers and other trusted adults. Learning how to express

TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- Invest in your relationship with your child or loved one.
- Model healthy social connection.
- Help children and adolescents develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with supportive adults.
- Encourage healthy social connections with peers.
- Be attentive to how your child spends their time online.
- Identify and aim to reduce behaviors that may increase the risk for social disconnection.
- Watch and listen for potential warning signs of loneliness and social isolation and connect children or youth to helpers if they are struggling.

and manage emotions helps children build stronger friendships and relationships, shapes how they treat others, and impacts how they deal with challenges, even into adulthood.

Thoughtful Parenting - As children grow their needs change. Parents' understanding of child development and their parenting practice need to evolve to accommodate. Social connections provide parents with support and stress relief on their parenting journey, timely sources of parenting information, connection to resources, social activities and outlets, and assistance caring for their child.

Strong Connections - Parents often struggle to maintain the connections that provide meaningful support and much

needed balance to their lives. It is essential for parents to prioritize the preservation and maintenance of important relationships and seek opportunities to form new friendships. Modeling healthy relationships and social interactions teaches children how to replicate and sustain those connections in their own lives. Furthermore, surrounding children with safe, supportive, and caring adults helps to offset adversity and paves the way for healthy adulthood.

Inner Strength - Social connections help parents to nurture and sustain their own inner strength and resilience. Having relationships with trusted adults who can step in and help provide time to re-charge is beneficial for both the parent and the child. A parent who feels supported by their network of connections and relationships can feel better prepared to respond with strength and flexibility during challenging times.

Practical Help - Parents, children, and families who have individuals in their lives that are well positioned to notice when they are struggling and who feel comfortable reaching out to offer help, benefit greatly from those social connections. Asking for help is challenging, but it can be less daunting if a family feels they have strong, reciprocal connections with people or organizations that want to see them thrive.