

STRONGER Together

Building a more connected community



“Together we can build a community that is healthier, more resilient, less lonely, and more connected.”

- U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy

Human beings are wired for connection, and we thrive—emotionally, spiritually, and physically—when we have people who care about us, places we feel we belong, and a sense of purpose.

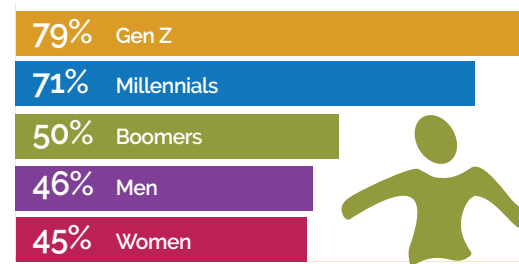
- Research shows that without adequate connection, loneliness and isolation contribute to depression, heart disease, stroke, anxiety, and dementia. The health impact of social isolation is more harmful than smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
- The U.S. Surgeon General and many others consider loneliness and isolation to be one of the largest public health challenges we face.
- Loneliness is linked to social isolation but it is not the same thing. Loneliness is an emotional experience: an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. Social isolation is measurable: the level and frequency of one's social interactions.

Who is lonely?

Loneliness can affect anyone, although certain factors can increase our risk of loneliness. Loneliness is higher for people who:

- are teen girls
- are new parents and single parents
- earn less than \$50K annually
- are Black and Latinx
- belong to the LGBTQ+ community
- are 75 years of age or older
- are living with a disability

Percent of U.S. Adults who are Lonely

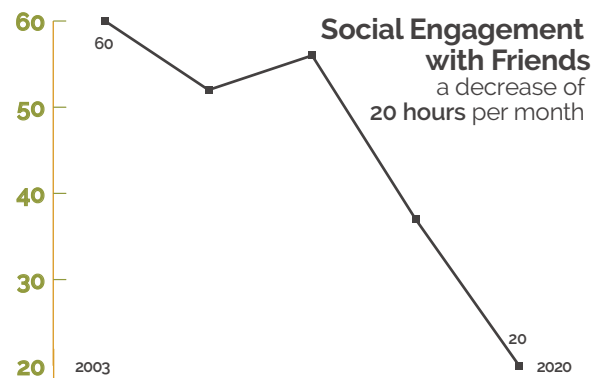


Data Source: Ipsos polling for Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index, 2019.

What is fueling isolation and loneliness?

We are all navigating a changing world. Too often, our relationships take a backseat to other demands and priorities.

- According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, the time we spend engaging with our family and friends has been in decline since 2003.



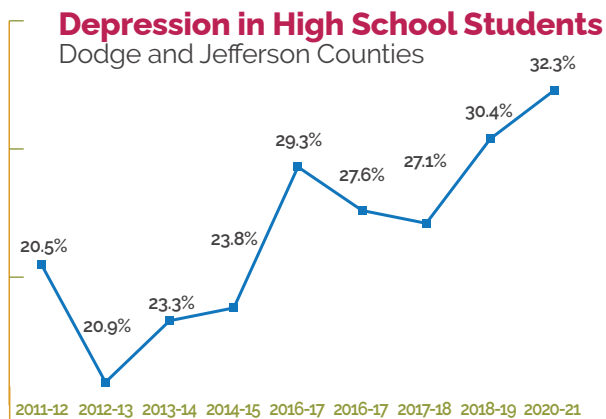
Data source: Adapted from Viji Diane Kannan, Peter J. Veazie, US Trends in Social Isolation, Social Engagement, and Companionship: Nationally and by Age, Sex, Race/ethnicity, Family Income and Work Hours, 2003-2020.

- In the late 1970s, 52% of 12th graders said they got together with their friends almost every day. By 2017, only 28% did.

Isolation and loneliness in teens

The rise in depression and anxiety began well before the pandemic.

- The percent of high school students in Dodge and Jefferson Counties reporting depression ("prolonged, disruptive sadness") has doubled over the last ten years.
- Even before the pandemic, 56% of middle school girls (age 14) felt so sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row they stopped doing some usual activities.



Data source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) question: "Students who experienced prolonged, disruptive sadness in past 12 months." YRBS includes high school students only. Schools distributing the survey vary by year.

Together, we can create a better future

Our focus is on the everyday steps that help us build connection—for ourselves and throughout the community. Starting with individual actions and working outward through respective agencies, employers, schools, faith communities, civic clubs and more... it is possible to build relationships, environments and policies that support connection.

Our goal is to support hundreds of community conversations, activate thousands of individual pledges of support and dozens of organizational pledges to participate in this community movement to support social connection.

Get involved

Take the pledge. Share your commitment to the community movement to reduce loneliness and isolation in Dodge and Jefferson Counties, and you'll automatically receive news and updates on activities in our region.



Make social connection a priority in your daily life:

- **Spend time each day with those you love.** This is not limited to members of your immediate household. Devote at least 15 minutes each day to connecting with those you care about.
- **Focus on each other.** Try to eliminate distractions and give the other person the gift of your full attention.
- **Embrace solitude.** The first step toward building stronger connections with others is to build a stronger connection with oneself. Solitude allows us to check in with our own feelings and thoughts. Meditation, prayer, art, music and time spent outdoors can all be sources of solitary comfort and joy.
- **Help and be helped.** Service is a form of human connection that reminds us of our value and purpose in life. Giving and receiving both strengthen our social bonds—checking in on a neighbor, seeking advice, can all make us stronger.