
Introduction to Loneliness and Isolation

Autism Society of Maryland

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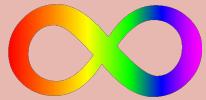
Self-Love Series: Strategies to Overcome Isolation

- Part 1: Introduction to Loneliness and Isolation

- Part 2: So You Wanna Make (Online) Friends: How to Safely Navigate the (Online) World

- Part 3: Embracing Neurodiversity: Getting to Know Your Own Brain

- Part 4: It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: Building Your Supportive Community and Facilitating Integration

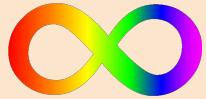




Objectives

- Defining Loneliness/Isolation
- Where do we get our ideas from on this topic?
- Educating about autistic loneliness
- Promoting self-love



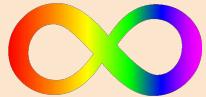


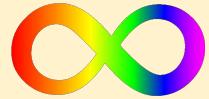
Trigger warning

We will be covering some sensitive topics during this webinar.

If you need to step away, please do so, and come back if you're ready.

If you have thoughts of suicide, please contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.





Ice Breaker

- Slido multiple choice





What are Loneliness and Isolation

- Isolation: lack of social connections.
- Loneliness: not feeling included. The perception of not being included.





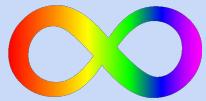
Research

While there is not much research on loneliness and autistic people, we know from people's stories that this issue is widely prevalent.

A 2022 study ([Umagami et al, 2022](#)) found several key reasons autistic people feel less lonely, including:

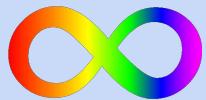
- Self-acceptance
- Social relationships with other autistic people
- Skill-building activities





Reframing the topic

- Autistic people are not the only ones who feel isolated.
- You might be asking yourself: Am I doing something wrong individually, or is this a systemic issue?
- Autistic people may enjoy “me time”
- We get our ideas about success in many areas of life through the media.

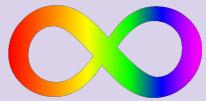




Why do autistic people feel lonely?

- Autistic people feel even more isolated when they're around non autistic people. Feelings of needing to **camouflage** or **mask your true self**.
- Fewer or less experiences, failed in the past. **Internalized ableism**.





SLIDO

When you feel lonely, what helps you climb out?

Write-in question





The Role of Social Media

- People who seem happy online might actually be the loneliest.
- People typically only put positive stuff online, so you don't see everything else.
- Technology feeds us more of what we watch, not what is good for us.





Isolation and Mental Health

- We are a social species - we need connection and community to thrive.
- Over time people incur mental health problems when they don't feel connected with the in-group.
- Examples: depression, anxiety, thoughts of suicide





The role of alcohol and drugs

- Many social opportunities occur around alcohol and drugs, including at bars. These places tend to be loud and unpredictable.
- People who don't drink might have a harder time feeling included.
- Drinking alcohol and using drugs as a way to cope can cause additional mental health issues





What's COVID Got To Do With It?

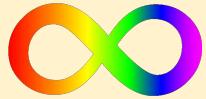
Autistic loneliness (similar to the general population) was an issue before COVID.

Staying at home, social distancing, and closure of some services led to further isolation.

But also working from home and reduced social obligations benefited some autistic people.



Now where are we?



Self-Love

- **Self-Love:** acceptance of yourself, including your strengths and weaknesses
 - Give yourself grace.
 - Normalize and reflect.
 - The way you meet your goals might look different from others.
 - No one is perfect. We all are works in progress.





Concrete Steps

- Start with the basics:
 - What did you like to do as a child?
 - What gives you joy?
- Just know:
 - Some interests are more isolating than others.
 - How could you bring together a group to do this with others?

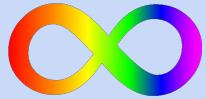




Places to start making connections

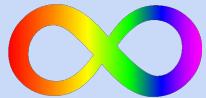
- Around the dmv that play to your interests and skills
- Is there someone to help make an introduction?
- Do you have to go alone or is there someone you can go with?
- Can you call the place to get more information?

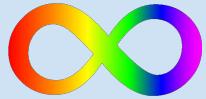




Opportunities!

- During the pandemic, many people went online and actually found online spaces more inclusive and easier to navigating
- Meetup.com
- Going out by yourself and inviting people to come with you

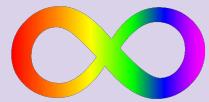




Resources

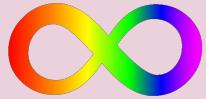
- Autism Society of Maryland (AUSOM)
- Autism Society of Baltimore-Chesapeake
- Integrated Living Opportunities (ILO)
- Upcounty Community Resources (UCR)
- Potomac Community Resources (PCR)
- The Jubilee Association of Maryland
- Spectrum Friends Meetup
- AANE (Association for Autism and Neurodiversity)
- DC Peers
- Montgomery Parks
- Montgomery Recreation
- AAGW
- Slush & Krust Productions





Q&A





Next Session

Part 2: So You Wanna Make (Online) Friends: How to Safely Navigate the (Online) World

June 20 from 7:00-8:30pm

