

Alone Together

The mental health impact of loneliness across life stages





Virtual Therapy

Mary Rogers Kirby, LPC



Download today's presentation
and resource toolkit



Agenda

Takeaways

- The powerful effect of loneliness on mental and physical health.
- Practical strategies to help clients combat loneliness

Today's Topics

- A closer look at the advisory on loneliness
- Mental health trends across life stages.
- The impact of loneliness across life stages
- Practical strategies for professionals

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community

Vivek Murthy, M.D., M.B.A

19th and 21st U.S. Surgeon General





Loneliness vs. Social Isolation

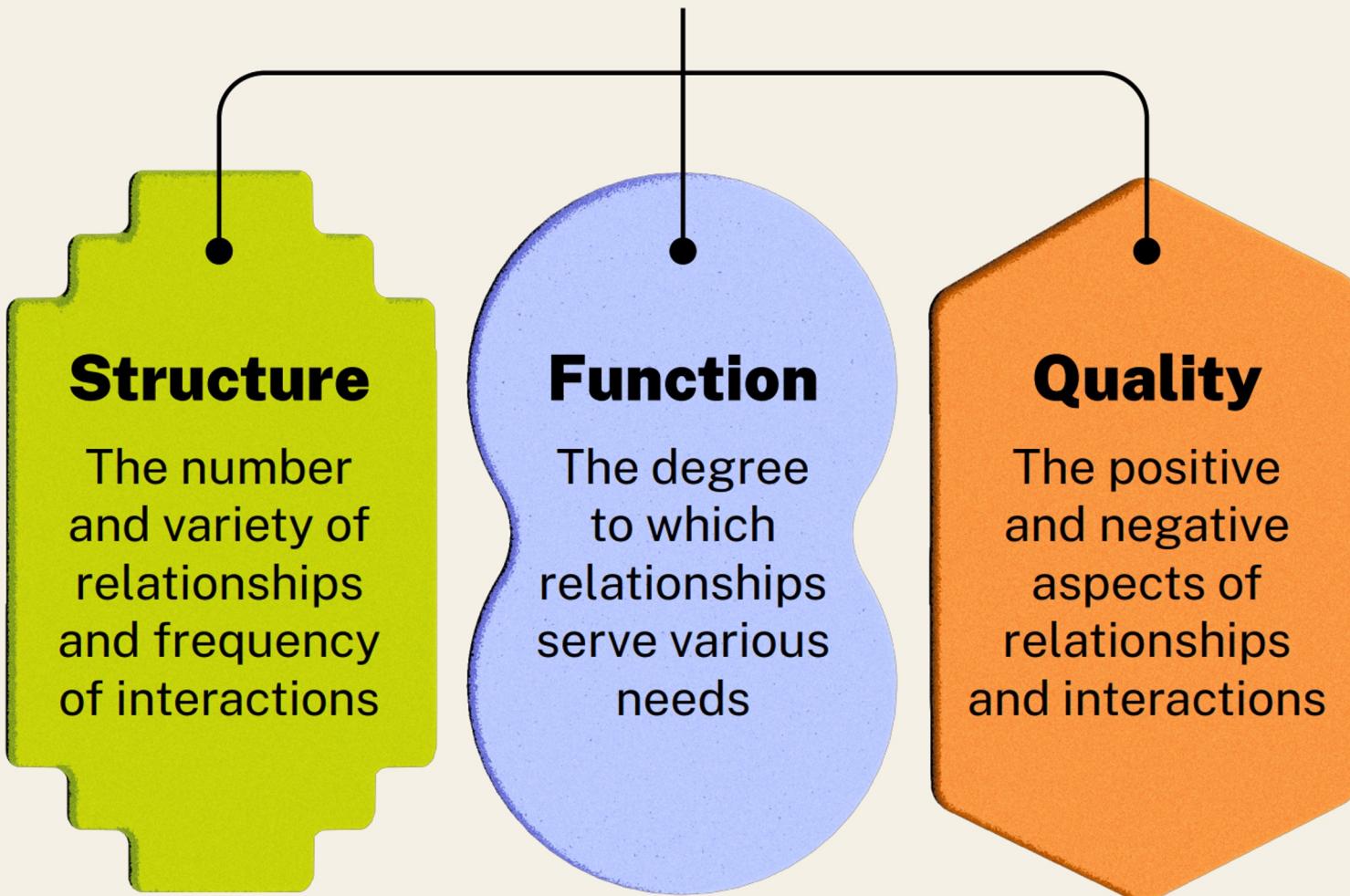
Loneliness is a subjective emotional state – a feeling of being alone or disconnected, even when surrounded by people. It stems from unmet social or emotional needs.

Social isolation is an objective lack of social contact – minimal interaction with others, regardless of whether it causes distress. Someone can be socially isolated but not feel lonely, and vice versa.

What is Social Connection?

The Three Vital Components of Social Connection

The extent to which an individual is socially connected depends on multiple factors, including:



Household Size
Friend circle size
Marital/partnership status

Emotional support
Mentorship
Support in a crisis

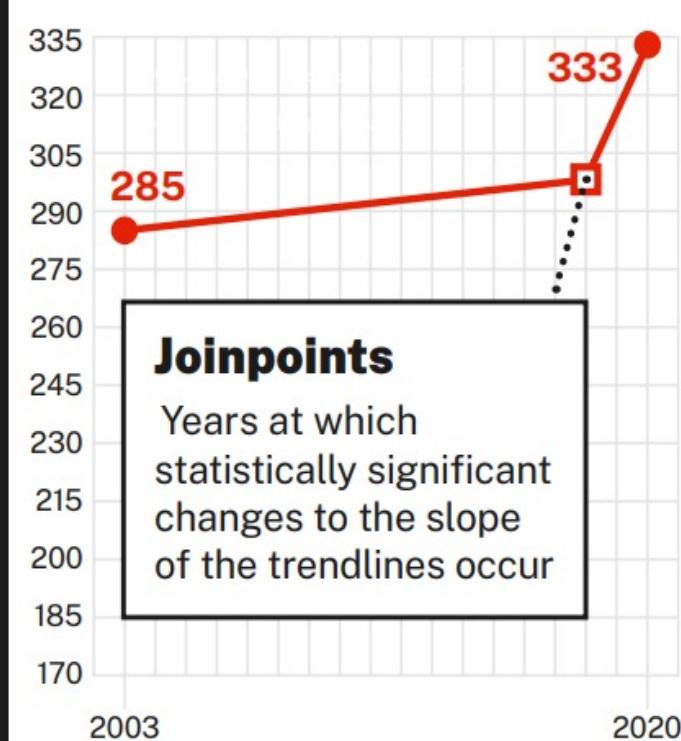
Relationship satisfaction
Relationship strain
Social inclusion or exclusion

National Trends for Social Connection

From 2003 to 2020, time spent alone increased, while time spent on in-person social engagement decreased.



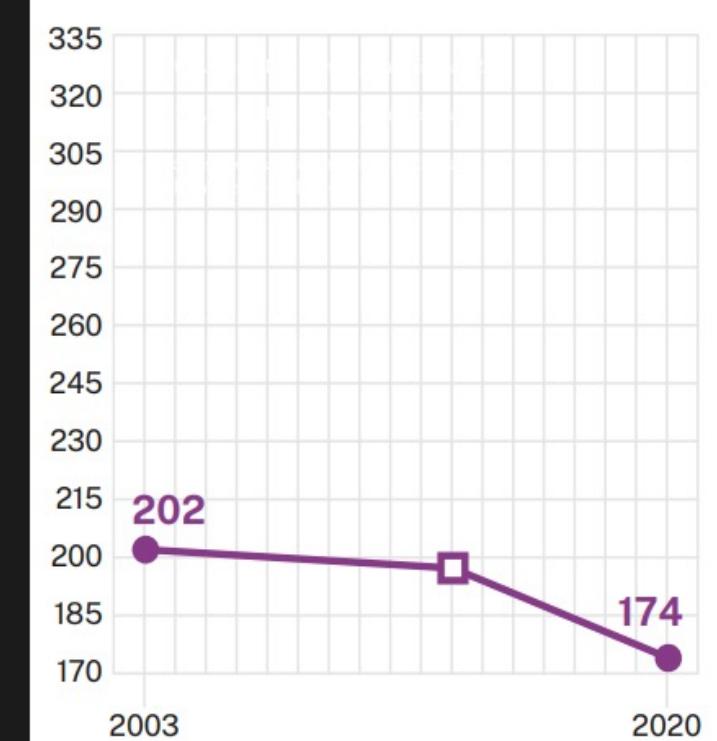
ANNUAL DAILY AVERAGE IN MINUTES



Social Isolation
an increase of
24 hours per month



Household Family Social Engagement
a decrease of
5 hours per month



Companionship
a decrease of
14 hours per month

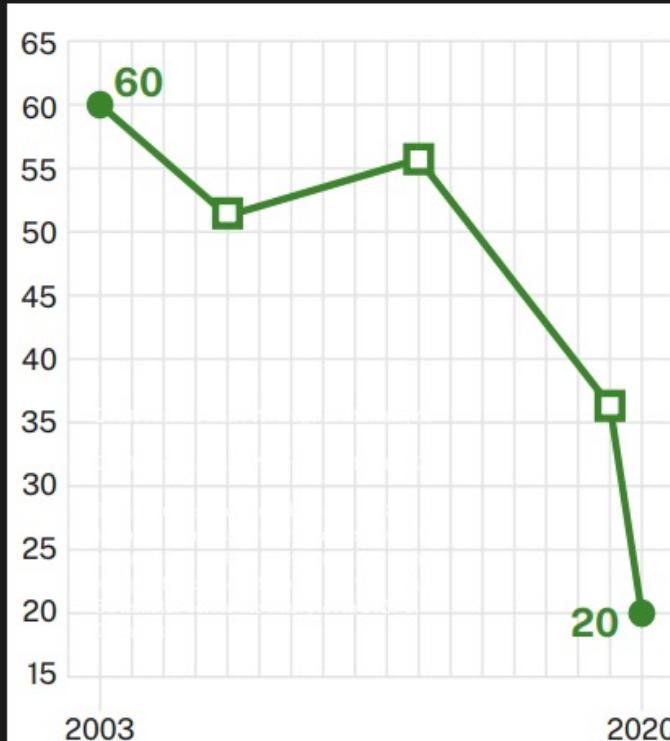
Companionship refers to shared leisure for the sake of enjoyment and intrinsic satisfaction

National Trends for Social Connection

From 2003 to 2020, time spent alone increased, while time spent on in-person social engagement decreased.



ANNUAL DAILY AVERAGE IN MINUTES



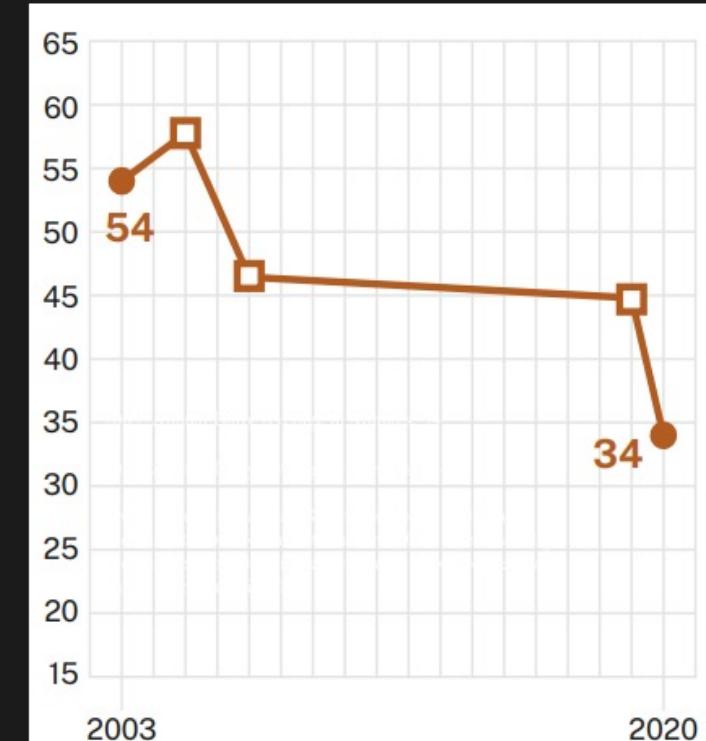
Social Engagement with Friends

a decrease of
20 hours per month



Non-Household Family Social Engagement

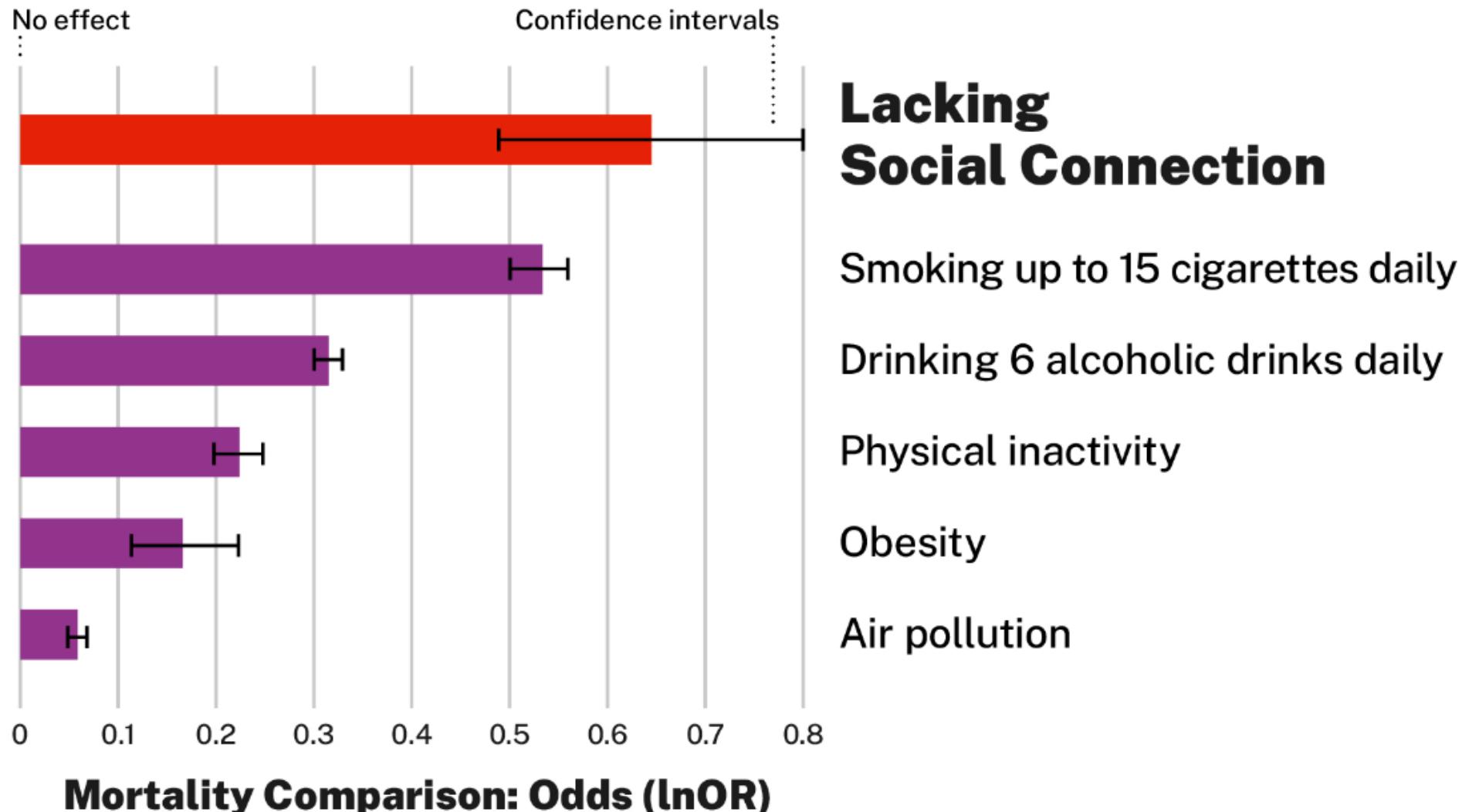
a decrease of
6.5 hours per month



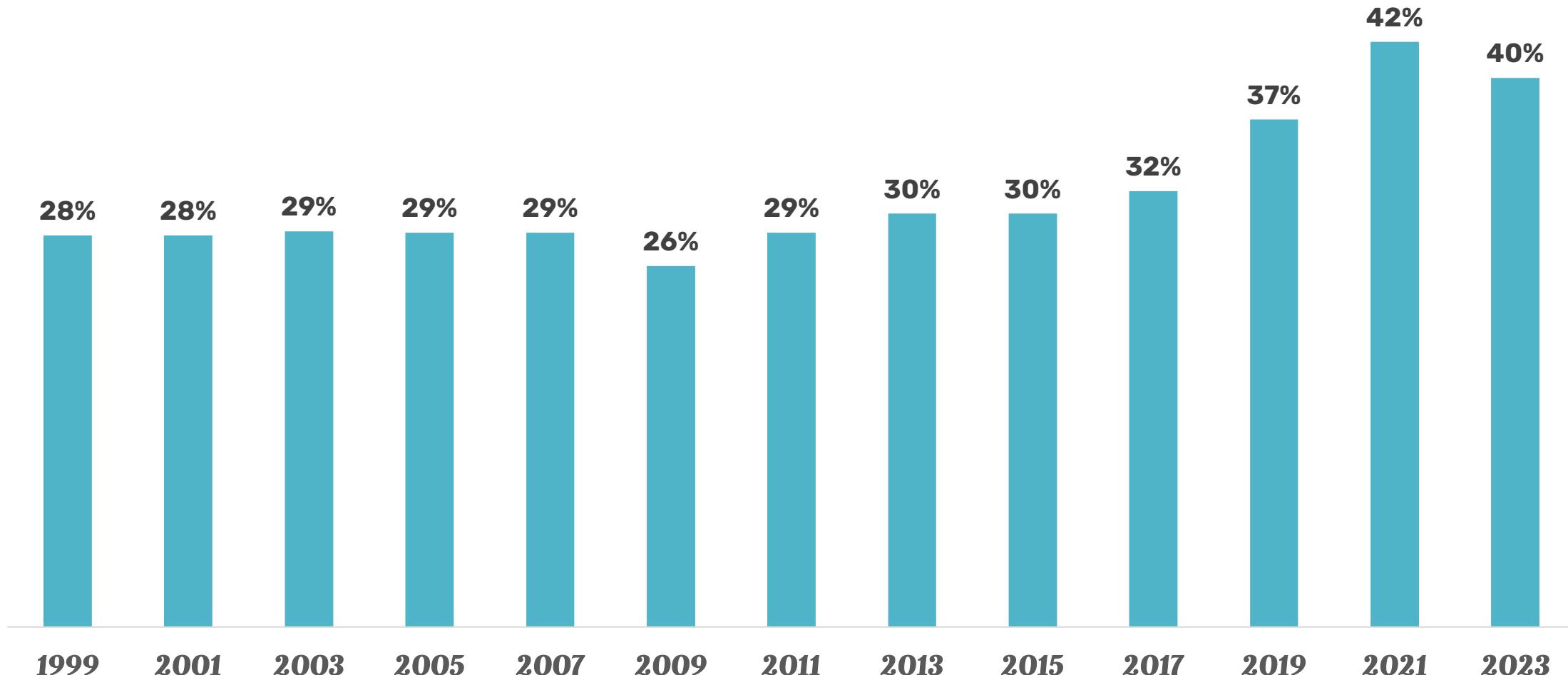
Social Engagement with Others

a decrease of
10 hours per month

Lack of social connection is an independent risk factor for death

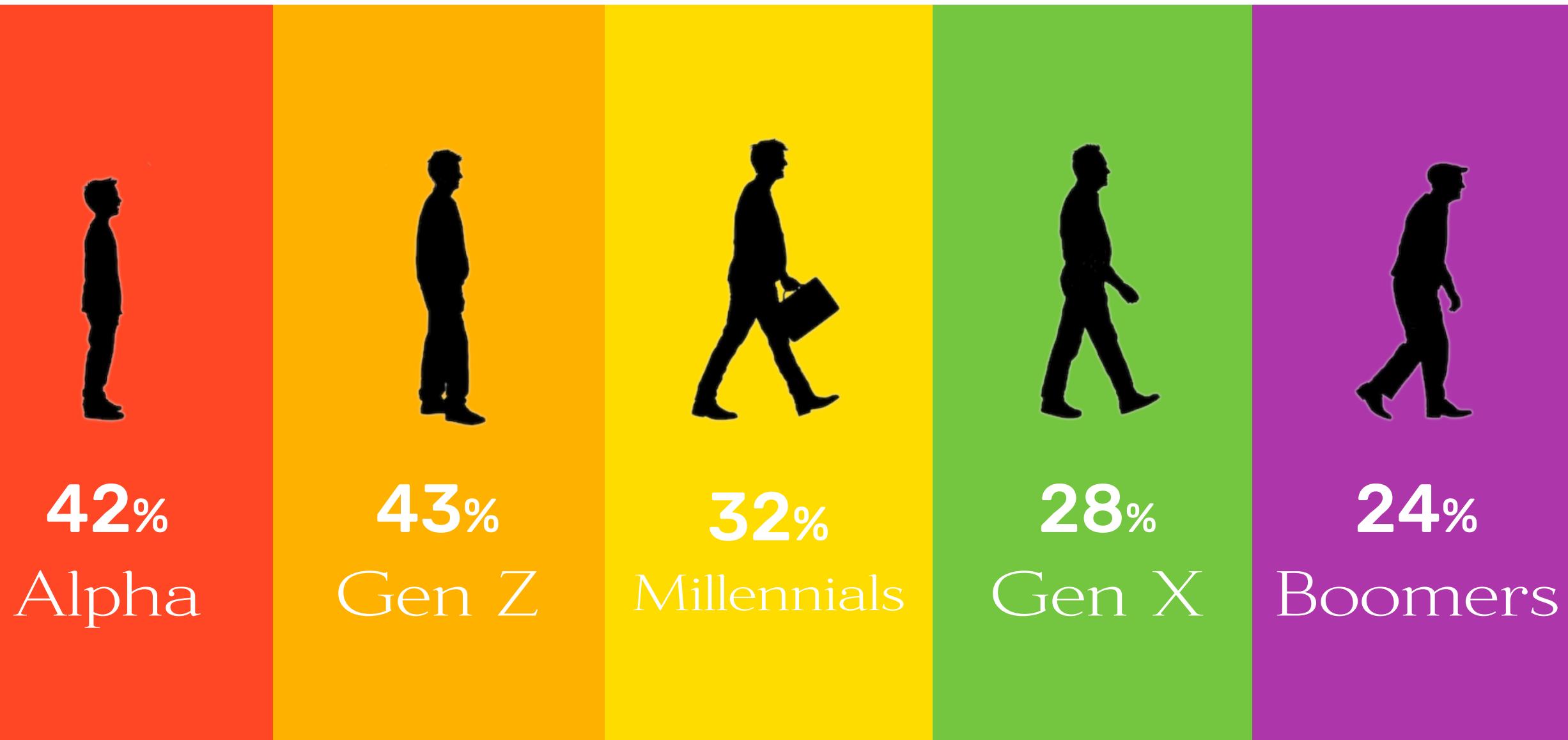


High school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness



Loneliness Across Life Stages

Feeling Lonely?



Sources of Loneliness



Alpha

- Social/emotional intelligence
- Technology
- Pandemic



Gen Z

- Overscheduling
- Stress over state of the world
- Social media
- Climate change



Millennials

- Student to professional life transition
- Romantic relationships
- Job & housing insecurity



Gen X

- Child & parental care
- Distance from friends & family



Boomers

- Health/Disability
- Mobility
- Distance from friends & family



Social Media's Impact on Loneliness



Not a replacement for in-person encounters.

Leads to and reinforces feeling lonely.

Increased social media use correlated with greater loneliness, even after accounting for age, cohabitation with a partner, employment, and health worry.

Impacts social skills.



Social Media Benefits

Discovering new interest groups

Staying connected with distant friends & family

Limit to 30 mins/day



How Can We Help?

Assessment Tools

Adolescents

[University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale](#)

[The Rasch-Type Loneliness Scale \(RTLS\) / De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale \(DJGLS\)](#)

[Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents \(LACA\)](#)

[Children Loneliness Scale \(CLS\)](#)

Adults

[Duke-UNC Functional Social Support Questionnaire](#)

[ALONE scale out of St. Louis University](#)

[Lubben social network scale](#)

School Professionals

Social Emotional Learning, SEL

Interactive Learning

Mentoring programs

Social connection in health curriculum

Support of clubs and extracurriculars

School events

Community Professionals

Familiarize yourself with organizations in your community.

Intrapersonal: targeting internal characteristics (esteem, negativity, negative emotions)

Interpersonal: behavioral representation of interaction with others (social and communication skills)

Identity exploration/beliefs/values

Guidance on healthy social media engagement

Offer resources and support for parents

Appendix

Resources

- United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). Our Loneliness and Isolation Epidemic: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General.
- Piore, Adam. (2023, December 8). As Teen Loneliness Rates Soar, Schools May Be Making it Worse. Newsweek.
- Kaiser Permanente. (2023, December 8). Does social media make you feel lonely? Here's why and how to avoid it.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General. (2023, December 8). Current Priorities for the U.S. Surgeon General
- Travers, Mark. (2023, December 8). Are You Suffering from Social-Media-Induced Loneliness? Forbes.
- Sebero, Heather. (2023, December 8). Addressing the Youth Mental Health and Loneliness Crisis Through Social Connection in Schools. Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.
- Mental Health America. (2023, December 8). Is Your Child Lonely (For Parents).
- <https://addhealth.cpc.unc.edu/>
- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>
- Hunt MG, Marx R, Lipson C, Young J. No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology. 2018;37(10):751-768.
- Deaths: Leading Causes for 2021
- Youth Risk Survey Results 2023
- Suicide and Homicide Death Rates Among Youth and Young Adults Aged 10–24: United States, 2001–2021

Resources

Protecting Youth Mental Health

Emergency Department Visits With Suicidal Ideation: United States, 2016–2020

Addressing Pediatric Suicide

Daily Screen Time Among Teenagers: United States, July 2021–December 2023

<https://mhanational.org/issues/2024/mental-health-america-youth-data>

<https://www.monitoringthefuture.org>

<https://www.pewresearch.org>

Associations between social media use and loneliness in a cross-national population: do motives for social media use matter?

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/pdfs/mm7324a1-H.pdf>

<https://springtideresearch.org/thirteen-a-first-look-at-gen-alpha#data>