

MELD Combating Loneliness

A New Frame for Shifting Loneliness

MELD addresses loneliness by recognizing the critical difference between independence and isolation. Independence, characterized by self-reliance and capability, is often viewed positively, whereas isolation can lead to loneliness and has negative connotations. MELD emphasizes the human need for connection, highlighting how our evolutionary background has wired us for tribal belonging, where each member contributes to and benefits from the collective welfare. This perspective underscores the importance of community for both giving and receiving support, which is essential for mental and emotional health.

To combat loneliness, MELD integrates several strategies. The organization promotes the idea that seeking connections and building relationships is as crucial for emotional well-being as physical exercise is for bodily health. It challenges the stigma associated with loneliness by sharing stories of successful individuals who have faced and addressed their loneliness or mental health struggles, thus normalizing these experiences. MELD encourages viewing the journey out of loneliness as an act of resilience, aligning with the value many men place on overcoming challenges and demonstrating strength. Additionally, it frames loneliness as a holistic health issue, advocating for emotional connection as part of overall well-being. Leadership development is also a key focus, with the understanding that effective leadership encompasses communication, empathy, and relationship-building skills, which can be enhanced by addressing personal experiences of loneliness.

How MELD Supports Men

Emotional Connection: The MELD program is designed to help men access, understand, and learn to express their emotions. Men who are feeling lonely often struggle with expressing or even understanding their feelings. By creating a safe space for this exploration, MELD can help men feel more understood and less alone.

Building Relationships: MELD offers a community of like-minded men who are also seeking deeper connections. Through group experiences and retreats, participants can meet and form bonds with others who may be experiencing similar feelings and want authentic connections.

Improving Communication: A key focus of MELD is to teach men how to communicate more effectively and authentically, which can lead to improved relationships in all areas of life. This can be particularly helpful for men who feel isolated due to difficulty expressing themselves.

Establishing Support Networks: Through regular meetings, either in-person or online, men can develop a support network which can be a crucial tool for combating loneliness. It is a space to share challenges, fears, dreams, and accomplishments, as well as a place to receive feedback and support.

Skill-building Trainings: MELD hosts various workshops and retreats aimed at building emotional intelligence and communication skills. These opportunities not only help men connect with others but also equip them with practical tools for navigating their feelings of loneliness.

Mentoring and Coaching: Some men may need more individualized support. MELD provides one-on-one coaching sessions where men can develop emotional-physiological skills and work on their specific issues, including feelings of isolation.

Creating Self Practices: Through its programs, MELD encourages somatic mindfulness and emotional connections, which can help men better accept themselves and their emotional states. This self-awareness can provide a sense of control and peace, even in the midst of loneliness.

Ongoing Community Engagement: MELD fosters ongoing relationships through social media groups, newsletters, podcasts, events, and trainings. This continued engagement can help mitigate loneliness by providing regular touchpoints with a supportive community.

Contributing to Other Men: Men discover that showing up as themselves supports others in feeling safe and accepted. The act of being present immediately conveys emotional safety, allowing other men to not feel alone. Men leave a group meeting or an event feeling their presence made a difference for another man. From that experience, men develop a sense of value and purpose -- who they are matters.

A Community: Men collectively create a community of diverse men who feel safe and connected and enjoy supporting other men. A man is not alone if he belongs to a community of other men.

What Men Receive from MELD

Reframing the issue in the context of strengths, resilience, and growth is helpful in acknowledging and understanding loneliness in a way that feels safe and acceptable.

Strength in Community: There is value in being part of a community or team. It is common in sports or business to discuss the importance of teamwork and collaboration. Being a part of a community does not indicate weakness but rather the ability to cooperate and contribute to something larger.

Personal Growth: Loneliness is an opportunity for personal growth and self-understanding. Feeling lonely is a part of the human experience and confronting this feeling can lead to deeper self-knowledge and emotional intelligence.

Connection and Networking: Community engagement is an important facet to networking and building valuable connections. Professional development is a concept that most people understand and value.

Independence vs. Isolation: There is a difference between being independent (a trait often admired) and being isolated. Independence involves being self-reliant and capable, but isolation can lead to loneliness and is typically not healthy or productive.

Interdependence: We are hardwired for connection -- be it as tribe that provides and protects its members or the child needing care longer than any other animal. Being part of a community is a chance to receive needed support. It is also an opportunity to be valued for supporting others.

The Fitness Analogy: Just as regular physical exercise is necessary for maintaining physical health, maintaining relationships and connections is important for mental and emotional health.

Role Models and Stories: Sharing examples of successful people who have openly dealt with loneliness or sought help for mental health issues can help to normalize these experiences and encourage others to follow suit.

Resilience: Overcoming loneliness is an act of resilience. Many men appreciate the idea of overcoming challenges and showing strength in the face of adversity.

Health and Wellness: Loneliness should be viewed in the context of overall health and wellness. Just as you would take care of your body by eating healthy and exercising, taking care of your emotional wellbeing by connecting with others is equally important.

Leadership: A good leader understands the importance of communication, empathy, and relationships. By working on their own experiences of loneliness, men can develop these skills and become better leaders.

Statistics on Male Loneliness

Men and Suicide: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention stated in 2019 that men died by suicide 3.63x more often than women. This indicates a high level of loneliness and untreated mental health issues among men.

Single Households: According to U.S. Census data, in 2020, single-person households accounted for 28% of all households in the country. This is a significant increase compared to decades ago, with more men now living alone and potentially experiencing loneliness.

Male Friendships: A study by the Movember Foundation in 2016 found that 51% of respondents reported having two or fewer close friends, and 15% had no close friends. This lack of social connection can lead to loneliness.

Social Isolation: A survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) in 2018 found that 22% of all adults in the US said they often or always feel lonely, that they lack companionship, or left out.

Marital Status: The same KFF survey found that 29% of adults who were divorced, separated, or widowed reported feeling lonely often or always, compared to 18% of those who were married.

Physical Health: According to a study published in the journal *Heart* in 2016, loneliness and social isolation are linked to a 30% higher risk of having a stroke or developing heart disease.

Mental Health: Research has found that loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

Substance Use: Men who feel lonely are more likely to abuse substances, including alcohol and drugs, per the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Older Men: According to Age UK, half a million men over the age of 65 in the UK reported feeling a high degree of loneliness, highlighting that loneliness can increase with age.

COVID-19 Impact: The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated feelings of loneliness. A report by the Centre for Men's Health at Leeds Beckett University in the UK found that men -- especially those living alone -- experienced higher levels of loneliness during the pandemic.

Men and Isolation: According to the "Men's Health Forum", in the UK, 2.5 million men have no close friends, which can lead to feelings of extreme loneliness.

Loneliness in the Elderly: According to a study by the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), 43% of seniors feel lonely on a regular basis. Among the elderly, men often report higher levels of loneliness than women.

Loneliness and Physical Health: A study by Cigna in 2018 found that loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, making it even more dangerous than obesity. Men often report higher rates of smoking and obesity, both of which can be linked to loneliness.

Mental Health: The "Mental Health Foundation" states that nearly half of adults (48%) in the UK feel that modern life makes it harder to have deep relationships. Men particularly struggle with this, with 28% feeling they have no one to go to when they have a problem.

Loneliness and Substance Abuse: According to a study published in the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, men who feel lonely or socially isolated are more likely to have substance abuse problems.

Impact on Work: The 2018 Cigna study also found that people who report feeling lonely miss work more often due to illness and feel less engaged with their jobs. This can lead to lower job performance and increased job turnover.

Depression Rates: Men, especially those over 50, are more likely to experience loneliness-related depression, but are less likely to seek help, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Veteran Loneliness: Among veterans -- who are primarily men -- approximately 11-20% experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a given year, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are common symptoms of PTSD.

Male Loneliness Stigma: According to a survey by the Jo Cox Commission in the UK, men are more likely than women to feel ashamed about feeling lonely and are less likely to admit it and seek help. This makes loneliness in men a hidden but pervasive problem.

Increased Loneliness in Men: According to a 2019 Cigna study, nearly half of Americans report feeling alone (46%) or left out (47%).

Loneliness in Older Men: Older men living alone are more prone to loneliness. The British Red Cross reported that over a fifth of the UK population (9 million people) often or always feel lonely, with a significant proportion being men aged 65 and above.

Lack of Close Friends: A survey by YouGov found that men were more likely than women to have no close friends. One in five men (19%) reported having no close friends, compared to 12% of women.

Workplace Loneliness: A 2021 Totaljobs survey found that two-thirds of UK employees (66%) have felt lonely at work, with men experiencing loneliness more frequently than women.

Men Less Likely to Seek Help: According to the American Psychological Association, men are less likely than women to seek help for depression, substance abuse, and stressful life events due to social norms, reluctance to talk, and downplaying symptoms - factors that can contribute to loneliness.

Loneliness and Mental Health: Research has consistently shown a link between loneliness and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Men -- particularly those who live alone -- have higher rates of depression, according to a 2014 study published in Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology.

Loneliness and Life Expectancy: Research published by Julianne Holt-Lunstad in the American Psychological Association found that loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, highlighting the significant impact on life expectancy.

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Sources

The Economist: [Why men are lonelier in America than elsewhere](#)