



Loneliness in
Ourselves and Others
PPA Convention
June 26, 2026

- Kirby Wycoff, Ph.D., MPH
- Randy Fingerhut, Ph.D.
- Rachel Ginzberg, Psy.D.
- Samuel Knapp, Ed.D., ABPP
- Sandy Kornblith, Ph.D.
- Ira Orchin, Ph.D.
- Jeff Sternlieb, Ph.D.

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Conflict of
Interest

The presenters are not declaring
any conflict of interest.

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Colleague
Assistance
Committee

The Colleague Assistance
Committee provides
education and experiences
to promote the well-being
of all psychologists and their
ability to serve the public.

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Program Description

- Loneliness and social isolation have been increasing among Americans in recent years and are factors in declines in Americans' health and sense of well-being.
- It is accompanied by a rise in "social junk food," or ways or formats of relating to people that create or foster unhealthy connections.
- This affects both the personal and professional lives of psychologists.

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Program Description

- This workshop highlights the significance of social connectedness for psychologists' mental well-being and outlines steps they can take to better integrate into a supportive community.
- It also considers issues emerging with patients surrounding loneliness, including the rise of social media and political polarization, which can diminish a sense of trust and social support among others.
- **This workshop involves participant interaction. Please have a paper and pencil handy.**

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Learning Objectives

At the end of the program, the participants will be able to:

1. Describe how social nutrition is related to their own well-being and professional competence.
2. Identify steps that they can take to increase their social connectedness.
3. Describe current issues related to social connectedness with patients.
4. Identify steps that they can take to help patients address their sense of loneliness.

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Presenters

- Kirby Wycoff, Ph.D., MPH., Director, Health Sciences Program, Thomas Jefferson University
- Randy Fingerhut, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, LaSalle University
- Rachel Ginzberg, Psy.D., Independent Practice, Philadelphia
- Samuel Knapp, Ed.D., ABPP, retired, former employee of PPA
- Sander Kornblith, Ph.D., Allegheny Mental Health Associates, Pittsburgh
- Ira Orchin, Ph.D., retired psychologist, formerly independent practice of psychology
- Jeffrey Sternlieb, Ph.D., MetWorks, psychology consultant

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Schedule for the Day

Brief Presentation

Social Atom Exercise

First Breakout Group

First Large Group Discussion

BREAK

Second Breakout Group

Second Large Group Discussion

Commitment to Change Exercise

Questions and Answers

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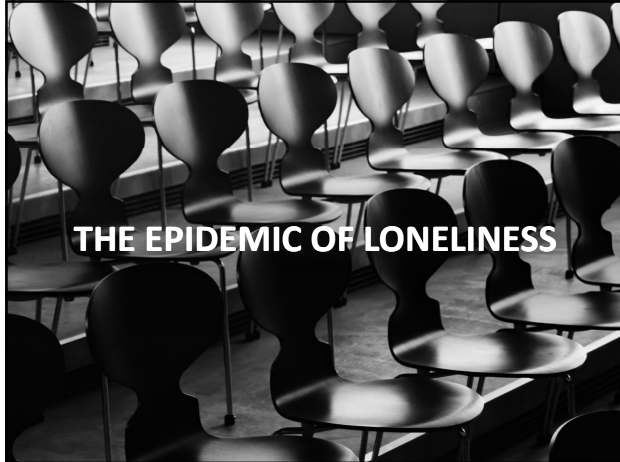
Commitment to Change

- We will be utilizing a commitment to change exercise later in the workshop.
- It is a technique to help you translate what you learn in the workshop to your professional experience
- As we present, see if you can think about what ideas or concepts will be useful to you.

Neimeyer & Taylor, 2019



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Social Isolation vs. Loneliness

<u>Social Isolation</u>	<u>Loneliness</u>
"...the objective state of having few roles, relationships, and social interactions with others."	"...a negative subjective emotional state, resulting from a discrepancy between one's desired and actual experience of connection."

WHO, 2025, xvi

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Loneliness is a Worldwide Problem

- Affects nearly 1:6 people globally
- Most common among adolescents and young adults and decreases with age
- More common in low-income countries
- Marginalized groups are more likely to experience loneliness than other groups

WHO, 2025

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Loneliness in the US

Only 47% of adults say that they felt very connected to others (Gallup Inc., 2023)

Approximately 1/3 of Americans report experiencing loneliness (Cigna Corporation, 2021)

15% reported feeling very or fairly lonely (Gallup Inc., 2023)

Loneliness is more widespread than other major health issues in the US, including smoking, diabetes, and obesity

Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

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Social Connection is Declining in the US

- The average time spent alone has increased
- The amount of time socializing with friends and family in person has decreased
- The number of people who report having 3 or fewer friends has increased
- Fewer people report feeling attached to their local community
- Fewer people report belonging to a place of worship

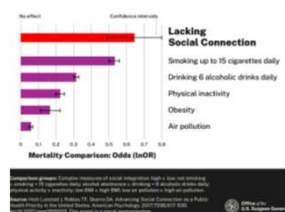


Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023; Kannan & Veazie, 2022

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Loneliness Adversely Affects Health

- Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by 26%
- Poor/insufficient social connection is associated with increased risk of heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression, and dementia



Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

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Social Connections Have a Beneficial Impact on Wellbeing

- In contrast, those with strong social relationships tend to live longer, have better health, and report higher well-being



Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017

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Social Nutrition vs. Social Malnutrition

Social Nutrition

Interactions that cause us to conclude that we are valued, loved, respected, and/or meaningful to others.

Social Malnutrition

Interactions that diminish our worth, or a significant lack of meaningful interactions that validate our worth.

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Relationships and Psychologists

- Socially embedded psychologists who have good relationships:
 - experience less burnout
 - have fewer disciplinary complaints with licensing boards.
 - have fewer malpractice complaints.

Yang & Hayes, 2021; Schultz, 2018; personal communication Eric Harris

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Competence Constellation

- "...the cluster of relationships a professional has with people who take an active interest in and action to advance the individual's well-being and professional competence."

Johnson et al., 2013, p. 347

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Competence Constellation



Johnson et al., 2013

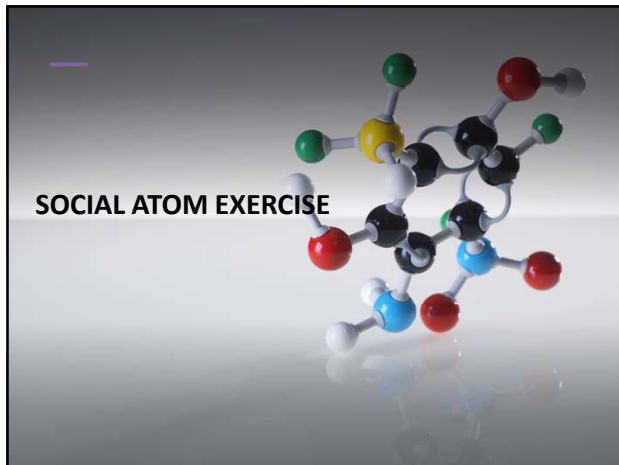
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Effective CC's Need to be Nurtured

- Psychologists must be active and intentional in developing and maintaining relationships within the CC

Johnson et al., 2013

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Social Atom Exercise

- The social atom is a tool developed by J.L. Moreno to map interpersonal relationships.

J.L. Moreno

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Social Atom Exercise - Instructions

- Please have a writing utensil available and be prepared to draw your own map, and if you choose, to share it with your small group.
- Draw your name somewhere on the page and place the important relationships in your life around you.
- Proximity indicates the strength and importance of the relationship.

J.L. Moreno

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Social Atom Exercise - Instructions

- Some conventional symbols:
 - Triangle for male
 - Circle for female
 - Square for non-binary
 - Solid lines between you and others — = solid connection
 - broken lines ----- = conflict

J.L. Moreno

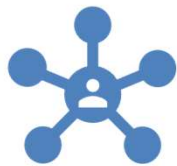
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Social Atom Exercise - Instructions

- Please include any important professional relationships.
- You may include the deceased and pets.
- Please feel free to design your map in whatever way that best fits you.

J.L. Moreno

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**WHAT CAN YOU DO
TO STRENGTHEN
YOUR PROFESSIONAL
AND PERSONAL
CONNECTIONS?**

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Instructions for Breakout Groups

- We will have approximately 7 breakout groups of up to 9 participants.
- Groups will meet to discuss their experiences with the social atom exercise for about 30 minutes.
- You can share as much as you are comfortable sharing.
- Each breakout group should assign one representative who will report back to the larger group after the breakout session is over.

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Reflection Questions for Breakout Groups

- What was your first feeling in viewing the completed map?
- Were there any surprises?
- How satisfied are you with the current state of your relationships?
- How has your map looked in the past and how would you like it to look in the future?
- What are some strategies to get there?

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Ideas for Psychologists to Strengthen Their Professional Connections

- Belonging and participating in professional organizations, including committees, CE programs, etc.
- Work or volunteer for a community group
- Engaging in interactive CE programs
- Join a consultation or study group
- Following up with members of your graduate school cohort

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Ideas for Psychologists to Strengthen Their Personal Connections

- Joining an interest group (e.g., hiking, book)
- Volunteer for a local group
- Reconnect with family members and friends
- Engage in neighborhood activities (e.g., block parties)

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Instructions for Breakout Groups

- We will have approximately 7 breakout groups of up to 9 participants.
- Groups will meet to discuss how to help your patients enrich their social connections for about 30 minutes.
- You can share as much as you are comfortable sharing.
- Each breakout group should assign one representative who will report back to the larger group after the breakout session is over.

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Reflection Questions for Breakout Groups

- How can you help patients improve their social connectedness?
- What obstacles to you anticipate patients may have to building their social networks?
- How would you address those obstacles?

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Ideas for Psychologists to Help Their Patients Enrich Their Social Networks

- Share research on the impact of loneliness on physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Evaluate and monitor patients' social networks in terms of breadth and quality (Social Atom).
- Encourage patients' to engage in small behaviors that increase social connection.
- Address cognitions that impede or harm patients' interactions with others.
- Reduce behaviors that lead to social disconnection (i.e., "social malnutrition").
- Encourage patients to get involved in their local communities.
- Practice prosocial communication in session.

Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

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Commitment to Change Exercise

- Take a moment to reflect on what has been presented.
- See if you can identify at least two ideas that you believe will help you to either improve your or your patients' social relationships?

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Implementing Change

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how easy would it be for you to implement each change?
- 1 – I can easily make this change.
- 10 - I would have great difficulty making this change.

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Impact of Change

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how big an impact would each change make?
- 1 – This change could reduce the number of patient suicide attempts.
- 10 - this change will never make any difference to any patient ever.

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Intent to Make Change

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to make this change?
- 1 - Not at all likely
- 10 - Definitely will make this change

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