

# What is the importance of social connection in children?

The proportion of young adults experiencing loneliness and isolation has increased every year between 1976 and 2019. Today, young people have among the highest rates of loneliness.<sup>1</sup> Research finds that experiencing loneliness in childhood not only negatively affects health and academic outcomes in youth, but is also associated with worsened health and economic outcomes in adulthood.<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>

Potential warning signs of loneliness and isolation in children include: increases in the time they spend alone, disproportionate online time, limited interactions with friends, and/or excessive attention-seeking behaviors.<sup>7,8</sup>

## What can parents and caregivers do to increase social connection among children?

1. **Invest in your relationship with your child or loved one.** Strong and secure attachments are protective and provide a good foundation for other healthy relationships as your child ages.
2. **Model healthy social connection for your children** and others around you. Some of these practices may include:
  - Exhibiting constructive conflict resolution.
  - Spending time and staying in regular contact with extended family, friends, and neighbors.
  - Setting time aside for socializing in person, away from the distractions or usage of technology and social media.
  - Participating in community events.
3. **Help your children and adolescents develop strong, safe, and stable social connections** by supporting their individual friendships, participation in structured activities (volunteering, sports, community activities, or mentorship programs), and relationships with trusted adults (e.g. grandparents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and mentors).
4. **Be attentive to how young people spend their time online.** Delay the age at which children join social media platforms and monitor and decrease screen time in favor of positive, in-person, connection-building activities.
5. **Talk to your children about social connection regularly** to understand if they are struggling with loneliness or isolation. These conversations can help destigmatize loneliness and social isolation create safe space for children to share their perspective and needs.
  - **Connect youth to helpers** like counselors, educators, and health care providers if they are struggling with loneliness, isolation, or unhealthy relationships.

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1. [Buecker et al., 2021.](#)

2. [Cené et al., 2022.](#)

3. [Caspi et al., 2006.](#)

4. [Danese et al., 2009.](#)

5. [Loades et al., 2020.](#)

6. [Ballard et al., 2019.](#)

7. [Mental Health America.](#)

8. [Ehmke et al., 2022.](#)

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For more information and resources on the harms of social isolation and loneliness, and ways to increase your level of social connection, read the advisory at: [surgeongeneral.gov/connection](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/connection)

