

HOT NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2021

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&

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Loneliness and Connections in the Holiday Season

Many of you would join me in asking its holiday season already, where did this year go? It was a time that challenged all of us especially those living alone. We have an opportunity now to reconnect and create happy times with friends and loved ones this summer holiday season. For some of us this is a time of feeling more alone than ever. So it's important to look at what we can do in this situation and how we can develop connections or reach out to others who are alone and build new friendships and connections.

*Whatever is beautiful?
Whatever is meaningful?
Whatever brings you happiness? May it be yours this holiday season and throughout the coming year!*



HOW CAN WE FIND CONNECTION?



Social Isolation & Loneliness with People living with HIV

One of the many reasons Social Isolation & loneliness affects many is connected to losses, especially losses affecting people who have lived with HIV for a long time, also known as “long term survivors”, lost significant portions of their social networks, which could contribute to feelings of loneliness. Those losses extended to family relationships, many are now of the age parents are passing leaving a sense of loneliness.

Loss of potential career paths that could have changed the quality of life for those who now live on meager means with a disability pension and aged pension. This is often compounded

with having no superannuation as it was either cashed in when they were facing their mortality in the 80's and 90's, or due to lack of work have no super to fall back on. The psychosocial needs of long term survivors is another area that has impacted many to be so alone, dealing with chronic stigma over a long period of time has caused people to withdraw from society and at times turn to substance use as a coping mechanism which only compounds the situation.

Survivors guilt has stagnated some to be frozen in the ability to get to a healthy place of normal, this can be compounded with the losses faced even today many of our colleagues who did survive are suddenly gone due to Cancer, Cardiovascular events or other sudden deaths. One factor we cannot dispute that is not sounding like doom and gloom is that their



HIV diagnosis has also been associated with positive traits such as mastery, resiliency, or self-efficacy. While most of that applies to our HIV elders those who have lived long term with HIV, what about our more newly diagnosed. A diagnosis can be a shock to any and often a time of isolation when dealing with disclosure and the fears attached to a diagnoses of HIV. Even with new treatments there are still losses and fears that drive people to a place of social isolation and loneliness. Services designed for PLWHIV do offer group events

especially for newly diagnosed to help with connection, accessing information that helps to learn they can live full, healthy and full-filled lives whilst living with HIV. Reach out and connect as it is life changing to build a community of people living with the same issues and fears.

What are the main signs & symptoms of chronic loneliness?

- I. Inability to connect with others on a deeper, more intimate level. ...
- II. No close or "best" friends. ...
- III. Overwhelming feeling of isolation regardless of where you are and who's around. ...
- IV. Negative feelings of self-doubt and self-worth.

Loneliness can leave people feeling isolated and disconnected from others. It is a complex state of mind that can be caused by life changes, mental health conditions, poor self-esteem, and personality traits. Loneliness can also have serious health consequences including decreased mental wellness and physical problems.



Social relationships and human connection are increasingly important as it can affect our physical and mental health. Psychologists at the Australian Psychological Society have recommended 14 tips to help connect with others and overcome loneliness. You don't have to tackle all at once, but hopefully a few can help you to enrich your interactions with other people.

14 tips to connect with others and overcome loneliness

1. Think positive

Worries about social situations can make you overthink your interactions. Don't dwell on worries about how you are perceived – shift your focus to the other person or the topic of conversation.

2. Forget comparison

Don't be concerned if others appear to have more or better friends than you. Quality and enjoyment matter more than quantity. Savour the moments of connection, wherever you can find them.

3. Expect change

Circumstances can leave us vulnerable to a sense of isolation. Relationships shift over time and we may lose touch with friends who were once important. Accepting change as normal can help you adjust.

4. Tolerate discomfort

Anxiety may cause you to avoid socialising. Understand that awkwardness does not mean you are doing anything wrong. Reach out to others and your skills will improve with time.

5. Listen well

Practice listening. Ask questions and really listen to the answers, rather than just waiting for a turn to talk. Respond warmly to people's experiences through your posture, facial expressions and words.

6. Rehearse

Out of practice with chat? Spend some time thinking about questions you can use when conversation stalls. You might ask if the other person has travelled far, visits this museum often, or liked the show.

7. Say names

Using someone's name when you know it demonstrates caring. Offer yours. Ask after their loved ones, or pick up a previous conversation topic, such as their pet, to show you have paid attention.

8. Go offline

Social media helps many people, but it can also increase disconnection. Ensure you have a healthy offline life. Perhaps invite trusted online friends to an offline meeting to build your relationship.

9. Chat to strangers

Unexpected moments of connection greatly improve your mood. Share a smile and eye contact with a stranger, or chat to a fellow commuter. Rise to the challenge of finding common ground with strangers.

10. Help

Helping someone gives a feel-good rush. Create a bond with someone by offering help, or asking for it. Something as little as assistance with a bag or holding a lift can help people feel seen and cared for.

11. Join in

Embrace opportunities to join, volunteer or participate. This connects you to other people, unites you in a shared activity, and provides an easy way to get to know people better.

12. Reconnect

Reach out to friends from your past. Many people welcome such efforts and the feeling that you care. If you plan a catch up, why not revisit a place or experience where you shared happy memories?

13. Manage stress

Everybody has some social situations they dread. Practice simple stress management techniques, such as breathing deeply and slowly, to help keep your stress in check through awkward moments.

14. Practice, practice, practice

Relationship skills can be learnt. Don't be discouraged. Remember that social connections are good for you. If you feel like you need support to build better connections skills, a psychologist can help.

To download the tip sheet, please visit the National Psychology Week website.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or you are struggling,

Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

If it is an emergency, dial 000.

Interview with HIV Elder on living with HIV as a Woman from Africa

By Dianne Nyoni



This segment with our Elders as I believe we need to not only pay homage to those elders who are still amongst us, but capture their stories and advice that we may learn from or choose to take-away as tools in our lives.

I am certain many of you would agree often our elders astound me how they have endured so much loss and yet can smile and laugh and be some of the most kind and giving souls you can meet. I think by interviewing in this segment on the topic of the month we can garnish great ideas, laughs and absorb their infectious lives they have created amongst a time of unprecedented change.

I spoke with an Elder I have known who resides internationally, she is a blogger and I wanted to today just share a blog she did recently on her blog about her latest speaking engagement organized by ViiV Healthcare.

Enjoy

FIVE ways to THRIVE

This month I had the opportunity to participate in the 'Stories from HIV Long-Term Thrivers' forum where I gave a spoken word performance alongside an amazing and inspiring panel. The forum was organized by ViiV healthcare.

How did I give this spoken word performance? I decided to share my five ways to thrive! Even today, to many people HIV is still seen as a disease to be ashamed of, they consider it as a big challenge while actually you can live a perfectly happy and healthy life. Here are my five ways to thrive for those who missed my speech:

Trust (again)

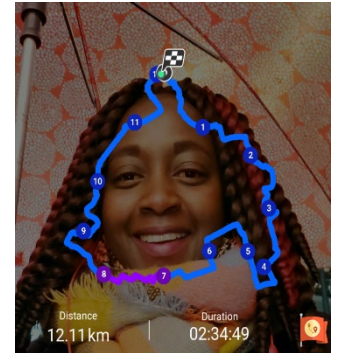
In 2003, when a doctor told me to buy my coffin when I was diagnosed with HIV and sent me away desperate, without a prescription, I spent a few hours thinking only about my death. I lost all confidence to live. Instead of looking for help, I started preparing my funeral. Hope started glowing when my husband brought me to another hospital for sound advice and to get my HIV treatment started. When I held my



first pills in my hand, I rejoiced in taking them because I firmly believed they were going to save my life. Only after regaining trust in myself, I was able to work on my next step...

Move (my body)

My new reality made me even more aware of the importance to keep myself in shape and healthy. But what gets me going? In 2003, I wore a beautiful sky blue wedding dress and I set myself as a goal to wear it again at my 20th wedding anniversary next year. So, I decided to walk at least 10 km every day to keep me in shape and make sure for me wedding dress to fit me again. Another really important driver was for me to reduce the number of pills I am taking as I also need to take care of my diabetes. So as a huge added benefit of my daily walks I was also able to reduce 4 pills. And my weight? Well, I lost 8 kg so far, just a tiny bit to go. I like my healthy new me!



Share (my emotions)



You all know by now that I came out of the HIV closet with a big bang! As a campaign poster girl, with my message posted all over Amsterdam. After staying with my secret for more than 10 years, sharing my story with the world was a huge relief for me and made me even stronger and more courageous. It was also a great motivator to help more people in the HIV community, for example by peer counselling and support people living with HIV on emotional wellbeing. It also motivated me to learn ever more about HIV, related

stigma and existing inequalities in the world. Last but not least, I also launched an initiative called Stories of Hope to show the diversity and talents of the HIV community worldwide.

Perform (my arts)

My greatest passion has always been to be on the stage. Since very early on in my life, I liked entertaining people. And I do so in many different ways, as a poet, through traditional Burundian dance or playing my indonongo... While I am lucky to consider my passion as my job, my key message to all of you is to work out routines, find hobbies or simply try to enjoy your job and all other great things in life. Creating and maintaining a diverse lifestyle is probably really my biggest secret to staying healthy. So, despite having gone through so much in my life, I am confidently looking forward to growing old.



Dream (my desires)

Unfortunately, in Africa people living with HIV/ AIDS are still dying. My nephew Kevin lost both his parents because of AIDS within 8 days in the year 2015. During the forum I shared my wish for a world where children like Kevin will not lose their parents anymore, where they can access health services so they can get tested and treated, and where they can grow old in good health. And right now, for Kevin I wish he can be supported to grow up in a community where he will not be stigmatised.



Yes it is possible to thrive whilst living with HIV. I, and many others in the HIV community, am an example of that. I am always proud to share my little secrets to growing old while enjoying my life with HIV!

Happy Holiday's and New Year from the HOT Advisory Group



Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

Headspace 1800 650 890

Men's line Australia 1300 789 978

Multicultural Mental Health 1300 726 289

Crisis Care (Counselling, accommodation & food) 9223 1111

Feel free to call these agencies to talk or be referred for emergency assistance. HOT will be available over the holiday period to call also.

WORD FROM OUR CONSUMER ADVISORY GROUP

“HIV can affect people from all age groups and genders, lets support each other in this life of living with HIV”

WE CAN DO THIS TOGETHER, STAY SAFE
