

HOW DO I INCLUDE?



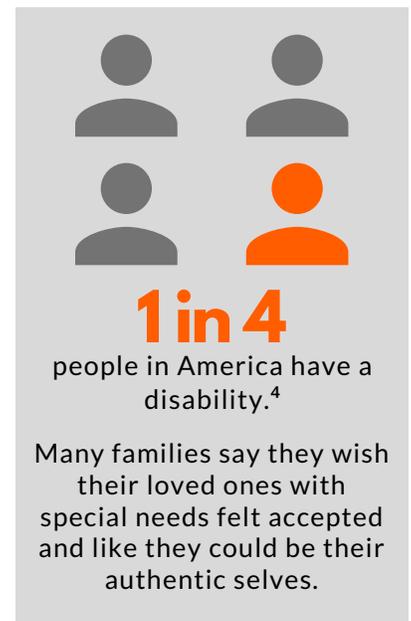
76% of individuals with **disabilities** feel **alone** and isolated. 45% are chronically lonely.¹

LONELINESS & DISABILITY

People need social connections. Feeling a sense of belonging, interacting with others, and communication are essential to human development and well-being. Unfortunately, current practices in our workplaces, society, and culture do little to eliminate the barriers to inclusion those with disabilities face.

Loneliness is a devastating **epidemic** for people with disabilities. In fact, 76% of individuals with disabilities feel alone and isolated. 45% are chronically lonely.¹ These are alarming numbers. Even more so when considering social isolation leads to a greater chance of poor physical and mental health.² Not only is overall health impacted, but **people who are lonely have shorter lifespans.**³

The bottom line: there is an extreme disconnect in the availability and accessibility of opportunities for those with disabilities and the need for it.



"Many people with disabilities are lonely."

Dr. Temple Grandin
Professor, Autism Advocate

IMPACT OF LONELINESS

When our society marginalizes an entire group of people, the effects are devastating to both physical and mental health. A meta-analysis of the most common health risk factors such as heavy smoking, binge-drinking, physical inactivity, and obesity shows that **poor social relationships** have a bigger effect on mortality than all of the aforementioned health risks.³

Presented By



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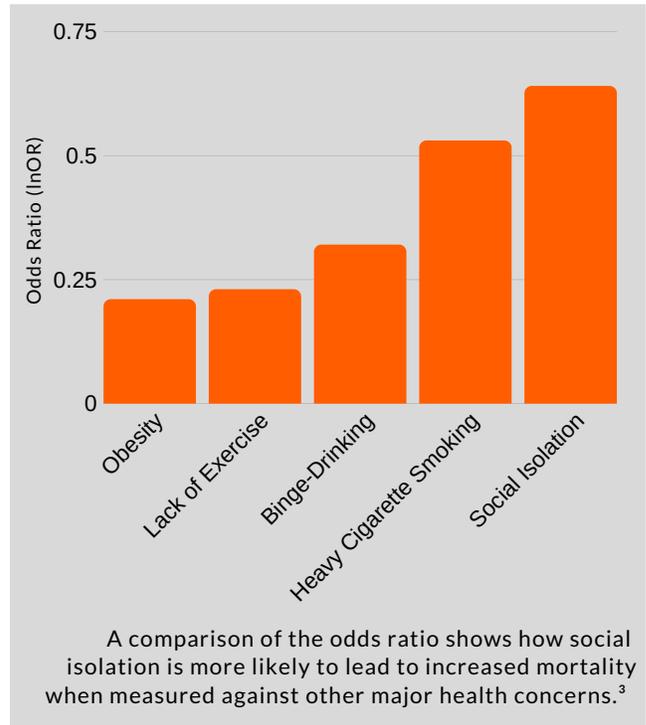
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IMPACT OF LONELINESS CONTINUED

Additionally, loneliness has been shown to severely impair the body's ability to regulate stress, increasing the likelihood of engaging in poor coping mechanisms and depression. When people are lonely, sleeping habits are interrupted and cognitive decline accelerates. Overall, this critically affects the immune system and cardiovascular health, leading to a decline in quality of life.⁵ In short, social isolation is affecting the longevity, mental health, and physical well-being of people with special needs.

NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS

- Mortality increased by 26%⁶
- Decreased immune system functionality⁷
- Depression⁵
- Poor coping mechanisms such as drinking, smoking, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts⁵
- Increased chance of developing clinical dementia⁸
- Interrupted sleeping patterns⁵
- Cognitive decline⁹
- Impaired ability to regulate stress⁵



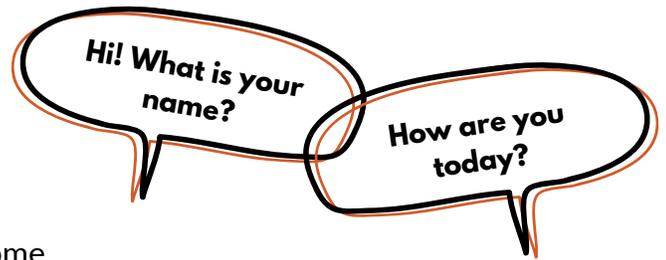
HOW CURRENT THINKING CONTRIBUTES TO THE PROBLEM

It is distressing to know individuals with disabilities are **suffering in silence** from lack of awareness. The general population is not aware that more than three quarters of individuals with disabilities report feeling lonely. People aren't making accommodations, not because they don't care, but because they aren't *aware* accommodations are needed. The good news is that it is easy to make a small change that will have a huge impact in the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of people with disabilities. It is **up to us** to end the stigma around disability and take that first step, reach out, and befriend people of all abilities.

"We can drastically improve the lives of individuals with special needs by making small changes in behavior."

Robin Lally
Founder, Help Us Gather

WHAT CAN I DO TO INCLUDE?



1 Be friendly.

- Smile and say hello. Let people know they are welcome.
- Talk to people of all abilities and get to know them. Ignoring someone isn't the "polite" thing to do – include them in the conversation.
- Find out and use their name.
- Look at the person when providing a service (not their caregiver).
- Speak in a normal tone of voice. Never assume someone's abilities.
- Be patient when waiting for a response, especially when a person uses a communication device.

2 Understand basic ways to accommodate people with special needs.

- Ask how you can be of assistance and consider ways to make someone more comfortable – Can I move this chair out of your way? Would you like me to guide you to your destination?
- Promote inclusion in your business and home – Is your building accessible to people of all mobility levels? Would someone with sensory processing needs feel comfortable here?
- Hire or provide volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Offer different options and allow people with special needs to make their own decisions.
- Look for non-verbal cues when communicating.
- Provide a sensory box with items such as headphones, sunglasses, fidget toys, weighted vests, etc.

3 Use your voice.

- Leverage your social media to promote awareness and start a conversation about inclusion with people who you already have rapport with.
- Vote for inclusive policies.
- Make a change in your own work environment – more mindful guest interactions, hiring diverse people, add a ramp or elevator, train staff in disability awareness, etc.
- Extend a helping hand to a family with special needs.
- Make it known that your business is disability friendly by becoming a HUG "We Include" member.
 - Become a member at www.WeInclude.org

IN CONCLUSION...

Including individuals of all abilities can be as simple as saying hello, asking someone's name or making a small accommodation. By making changes, we have a big impact on the lives of people with disabilities. Take the first step toward a more inclusive future today.



ABOUT HELP US GATHER (HUG)

Mission: HUG advocates for inclusion and connects people with disabilities to social events and activities

It is the goal of Help Us Gather or HUG that every individual in our community has a sense of inclusion, confidence and friendship. We accomplish this goal by providing a calendar of local events for individuals with disabilities, organizing HUG Ambassadors and volunteers, hosting social gatherings and attending community events. Help Us Gather is a part of The Helping Project, a 501(c)3 charity organization.

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