



GLOBAL
YOUTH CULTURE



CRISIS MODE

3 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR
TEEN WITH **LONELINESS**

RESEARCH IS KEY TO DISCOVERING THE STATE OF A GENERATION.



Global Youth Culture is a research study that covers the beliefs and behaviors of more than 8,300 digitally connected teenagers from 20 diverse nations. It shares insights into their views on identity, technology, personal struggles, and religious beliefs.

When reviewing the data, it became overwhelmingly clear that today's teens need help. Our research found that when asked about their experiences in the last three months, **75% reported feelings of loneliness.**

As a parent or caregiver, it can feel overwhelming to know that your child is struggling—but also know that you are not alone. We as the Church must take on this task of loving, helping, and discipling our teens right where they are. And we want to help you do that. In this guide, we present a three-part approach that will help you not only navigate mental health concerns but also connect with your teens through their struggle:

- 1. Be Familiar**
- 2. Take the Initiative**
- 3. Build Resilience**

Now, let's take a deep breath, invite God into this process, and get started.



SECTION 1: BE FAMILIAR



Becoming familiar with common symptoms will equip you to help your teen recognize and label their symptoms. Labeling is an incredibly useful tool; in fact, one of the primary ways we cope with difficult experiences is to find words to describe them. As we understand what is happening, we are better able to cope.

Below we present a general overview of loneliness. A teen doesn't have to meet all the criteria for a diagnosis to be struggling—even just a few of these symptoms can be overwhelming. Use these criteria to help your teen find language for their experience so that you can then figure out how to navigate it well.

LONELINESS:

Loneliness is an uncomfortable yet very common experience. Teens can experience loneliness in particularly acute ways as they are going about the natural developmental task of establishing their identities, which is inevitably done in connection to other people. Rejection has a particular sting for teens because their rational thinking brain is still developing. Pain, especially emotional pain, can feel like it will never end. Teens can have difficulty imagining a future different from their current experience.

Loneliness can be both a result of mental health struggles like depression and anxiety and a preceding factor. Teens who feel isolated will be more vulnerable to bouts of depression and/or anxiety. At the same time, teens who experience depression often self-isolate, further compounding feelings of loneliness, while anxiety often keeps teens from connecting with peers in meaningful ways.

One of the best things you can do for a lonely teen is to connect with them emotionally, which we'll unpack more in the next section, "Take Initiative." Your connection will not ease the pain of feeling rejected or isolated from peers, but it will give teens a stable relationship to turn to in that pain. Teenagers need to connect with peers during this developmental stage, so in addition to being a safe support for them, parents and caregivers can encourage teens to capitalize on opportunities for developing relationships. Teens struggling with apathy and listlessness due to depression can be encouraged to spend time with their friends anyway. Teens with anxiety may need help lowering their levels of anxiety so that they can connect with peers rather than projecting their own fears onto others.



SECTION 2: TAKE THE INITIATIVE



Armed with all of this knowledge about **loneliness** – what do we do?



1. **MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.** Your teen needs you to make the first move. Though teens are likely to go to family about big, meaning-of-life questions, only **1 in 4 teens in our survey reported that they often talk to their parents about things that are important to them.** When teens are depressed or anxious, they often have difficulty asking for help. This means that you need to start the conversation.



2. **ASK GOOD QUESTIONS BASED ON OBSERVATIONS.** People tend to become defensive when they feel vulnerable, and teens are no different. We must ask questions out of compassion, not as though we are interrogators. One way to do this is to ask questions that arise out of your observations, “I’ve noticed you’ve been sleeping a whole lot lately. Have you been feeling ok?” Help your teen identify and label their own symptoms of depression and anxiety by noticing and commenting on them.



3. **OFFER GENEROUS EMPATHY.** Start the conversation with the assumption that your teen’s concerns are real. The quickest way to shut someone down is to ask them to share vulnerably and then to minimize their concerns.



4. **HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES.** Educate yourself so you can educate your teen. Help your teen understand what anxiety and depression look like—offer this information to help your teen evaluate their own experience, rather than telling your teen what they are experiencing.



SECTION 3: BUILD RESISTANCE



Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. We can help lower our teens' risks for mental illness and help them cope with it by encouraging healthy practices.

HELP ELIMINATE OR MINIMIZE STRESSORS.

Teens are starting to have more control over their lives than they did as children, but they often need help in setting appropriate boundaries. Help your teen choose boundaries to set on things like social media and extracurricular activities. Help them identify which activities they do out of joy and which out of obligation or addiction, and empower them to say no when they need to.

INSTILL TRUTH.

Encourage teens to read Scripture and to memorize verses or passages that are meaningful to them. Encourage them to get involved in Bible studies that help them study Scripture for themselves. Our research showed that **Christian teens who were reading Scripture and praying at least weekly struggled significantly less in nearly every area.** The data is a testament that God's Word has power.

HELP CHALLENGE THOUGHTS.

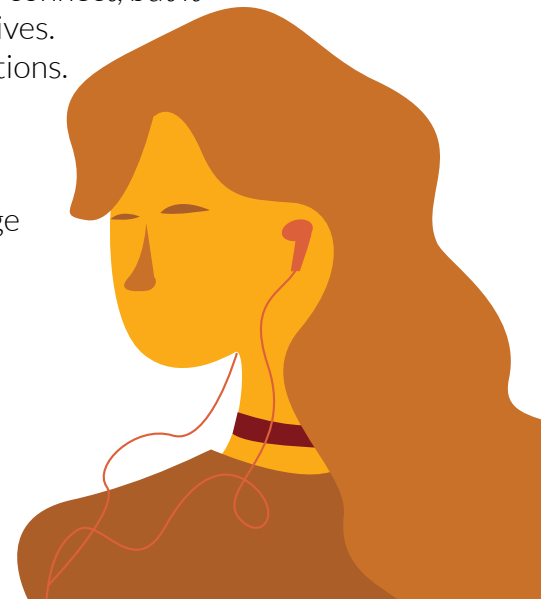
Sometimes, your teens may need help seeing the bigger picture. You can help them by educating yourself on typical thought distortions and helping your teen identify when they get stuck in crippling thinking. If you aren't familiar with types of thought distortions, a counselor can help.

CONNECT THEM WITH A THERAPIST.

Sometimes, through perhaps no fault of our own, our teens can't hear it from us. That doesn't give us permission to stop trying to connect, but it can give us a push to involve other caring adults in their lives.

Many teens are more open to therapy than older generations.

If your teen is struggling, ask if they would like to see a counselor. Therapists have lots of tools for helping teens deal with depression. They are also really skilled at identifying thinking distortions and helping people change the way they interact with their own thoughts.



RESOURCES



RESOURCES:

- Faber, Adele & Mazlish, Elaine (2012). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York NY: Scribner Classics.
- Murray, David (2020). *Why is My Teenager Feeling Like This? A Guide for Helping Teens Through Anxiety and Depression*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. S. (2012). *Boundaries: When to say yes, how to say no to take control of your life*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Books.
- [Crisis Mode Full Report](#)
- *Feed Ministry Resources:*
[Watch, Rest, Repeat Small Group Series](#)
- *YouVersion Reading Plan:*
[Part 1: Mental Health and the Church](#)

ABOUT GLOBAL YOUTH CULTURE

Global Youth Culture presents the findings of a research study covering the beliefs and behaviors of +8,300 digitally connected teenagers from 20 diverse nations. This study from OneHope shows insights into their views on identity, technology, personal struggles, and religious beliefs. The data also specifically reveals their attitudes about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian church. We believe this study is the most comprehensive of its kind in the world in terms of taking a deep look at the faith of teenagers globally. *Global Youth Culture* aims to equip the Church, leaders, and parents to understand today's connected generation. globalyouthculture.net

Global Youth Culture is an initiative of OneHope. Learn more about the ministry at onehope.net

