

YOUR **FARM**, YOUR **FAMILY**, YOUR **SUCCESS**

**CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY WEEK**

# Dealing with **Social Isolation & Loneliness**

#FarmSafetyEveryday

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Presented by:



## Dealing with Social Isolation and Loneliness

Isolation has become a hot topic during the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing aplenty over the past two years as we work to keep each other safe and healthy. And for many, the elimination of opportunities to connect with other people during the pandemic has brought on loneliness.

However, even without the pandemic, many factors that come from living and working on a farm – such as long hours, physical location, weather, and other pressures and obligations – can create social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation and isolation can have negative health consequences, such as depression, decreased sleep quality, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function, and weakened immunity<sup>1</sup>.

It's important to point out that loneliness and isolation aren't the same. According to the American Psychological Association, loneliness is defined by a person's perceived level of social isolation. In addition, the 2021 Canadian Social Survey on loneliness found that women are more likely to feel lonely than men<sup>2</sup>.

Loneliness affects everyone; at some point in our lives, we will all experience feeling lonely, which can be triggered by a variety of events or situations, including:

- Debt
- Illness
- Mourning the loss of a friend or family member
- Abuse
- Moving
- Weather
- Separation from family or friends<sup>3</sup>

Feeling lonely is often connected to mental health problems like anxiety and depression (they share similar symptoms such as feelings of helplessness). On the flip side, mental health problems can lead to loneliness since conditions like anxiety may hinder creating connections with people.

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1 The risks of social isolation. Monitor on Psychology, May 2019, American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation>

2 Canadian Social Survey: Loneliness in Canada. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124e-eng.htm>

3 Isolation and loneliness. Farm Well. <https://farmwell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/Isolation-and-loneliness.pdf>

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## **Making Connections**

Finding practical solutions to social isolation and loneliness can be challenging. After all, no one's circumstances are the same. However, a few useful techniques can help tackle social isolation and loneliness:

### **Talk it out**

Talk to a trusted family member or friend to let them know how you're feeling. Even sending a text can help.

### **Build a social circle**

Get something in your calendar! Plan and schedule activities in advance with friends, consider joining a club or sports team or even find time to volunteer for something you're passionate about. Granted, this may be difficult to do in the busy season, but having scheduled activities with others that you look forward to is a great way to combat loneliness.

### **Speak to a medical professional**

Don't hesitate to reach out to a medical professional, especially if you haven't had success with other techniques. Remember that symptoms of loneliness can be linked to mental health problems.



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## Maintain Healthy Relationships

Being connected to other people is a fundamental human need. Healthy relationships can safeguard against isolation, loneliness, depression, and even unsafe behaviours. But relationships require regular maintenance and work to stay fulfilling and healthy.

The following tips are helpful for intimate partner relationships, parental relationships, friends, or neighbours.

### 1. **Build Trust.**

Building trust means being open and transparent, respectful, and admitting when we are wrong. Working from a base of trust will ensure that relationships remain strong.

### 2. **Communicate.**

There are a couple of key elements for ensuring healthy communication:

- a) Communication must always be honest and respectful.
- b) Make an effort to understand by listening, not interrupting, and keeping an open mind.

### 3. **Establish Understanding.**

Empathy and compassion go a long way in understanding others and being understood.

### 4. **Know Yourself.**

This is crucial! Be aware of the things that set you off. Acknowledge any of your limitations and build on your strengths.

**Social isolation and loneliness can be serious issues on the farm. But it's important to know that you're not alone feeling this way. Remember that reaching out to those around you can help combat social isolation and loneliness.**

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