

To escape loneliness, we must become available

THE SUBJECT of loneliness is one that few of us discuss with anyone besides a psychiatrist, and then only when we feel we are in deep trouble.

As Suzanne Gordon noted: "What was once a philosophical problem, spoken of mainly by poets and prophets, has now become an almost permanent condition for millions of Americans, not only for the old and divorced, but also for the men and women filling singles bars and encounter groups, the adolescents running away from home, the corporate transients who move every two or three years and the people calling suicide and crisis hot-lines in search of someone to talk to."

Why are there so many lonely people in our midst? Among the primary causes are family instability, high mobility, the increasing divorce rate, and the striving for independence and personal success.

Consider the effect of divorce on the family. There are an estimated eight million children under eighteen who are the products of divorced homes. What impact do you imagine this has on the emotional integration of these children?

ONE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD girl of divorced parents put her feelings down on paper: "I get lonely because I miss my mom. I live with my aunt. My mom left me here while she was looking for a job. And then she got this boyfriend and she never came for me. I guess I could never talk to my mom when I felt lonely because she was lonely, too."

Psychologists believe that this increasing stress in the family may be one of the factors for the growing rates of both alcoholism and suicide among young people.

Indeed, the latter is the second leading cause



moral perspectives
Rabbi Irwin Groner

of death for those between 15 and 24. What we see emerging in white middle-class America is the kind of instability that used to be solely peculiar to poor and black families.

Even within "stable" marriage and interpersonal relationships, there can be loneliness if there is no communication. Couples can be strangers; friends can be remote; neighbors can be emotionally distant. In the absence of

communication and sharing, the loneliness grows. "Dialogue is the elixir of life" writes James Lynch.

SOME LONELY people withdraw from human contact because they lack trust in the honesty and the sincere caring of others. We can prove to them by our patience, understanding and supportive presence that their fears are unjustified. Selfishly, when you dig another out of his troubles, you will find a place to bury your own.

If we are to re-discover trust and friendship, we must be willing to respond and graciously accept the hand of caring. And, if there is no hand to grasp, then we must initiate the reaching out.

We must become activists and become involved in our community and in helping others. He who builds walls about himself or herself

will, in turn, become isolated from the mainstream of human kind.

DR. SIDNEY Jourard, in "The Transparent Self," tells us that we make ourselves opaque and unknowable in order to protect our fragile ego, but at the cost of our physical, emotional and spiritual health. The answer, he says, is to make ourselves "transparent" to make ourselves open and available to those we most love — our families and friends.

This is the escape route out of the prison of our loneliness, a path marked by sharing, self-disclosure and openness.

This happens because God has given us the capacity to love, to care about others. To look at the world through the eyes of love is to become related to all mankind and thus, to become insulated against the ravages of loneliness.

Advice on how to help an unconscious relative

Dear Jo:

My mother died this spring. While I was caring for her, I read your column on what to do to help an unconscious relative.

Besides talking to her and touching her, your suggestions, I took along a battery-operated cassette player (she was on oxygen) and played her favorite music. I knew she'd enjoy it and she did.

I appreciate your advice — It helped me to feel and be useful at a time when I thought I'd be helpless.

I just wanted to thank you for your timely column — and to pass along the battery-operated cassette idea to some of your readers.

J.J.

Dear Jo:

My mother is almost blind. She's 78 and is adapting better than most to this difficult health problem.

I don't know if you can help me, but I'm wondering if there is such a thing as a talk-

gerontology



A. Jolayne Farrell

ing clock? She is constantly asking people the time — as she can become quite confused if she does not know what time of day it is.

M.B.

Dear Mr. M.B.:

The only audio-response clock that I have seen is a pyramid-shaped one put out by Seiko. One presses the top and a voice states the time. To purchase one I suggest you contact a department or jewelry store that carries this brand.

I would also suggest that you contact

your local society for the blind. There are open-faced watches that the blind may use to feel the hands of the clock to know the time. They also have many other aids that help make life easier for a person who is visually impaired.

Dear Jo:

I know you have written often about the subject, but I suppose one can not speak too often about some things.

The subject is drugs. Why are people who are forgetful and confused given drugs? Many of the pills are quite strong and if taken too often (or not at all), as some older confused people do, the results can be quite serious.

I sometimes think that doctors just don't get enough time during a brief office visit to judge the state of mind of some of their patients. Since we were taught at an early age to be on our best behavior in the doctor's office, we can act pretty normal. Just last week, I noticed a man in the

drug store, already on several medications, buy several bottles of pain-killing pills. I was appalled.

Horried

Dear Horried:

Thank you for your letter. You have a right to be horrified. Older people make up

20 percent of the population and take 25 percent of the prescribed drugs.

Doctors and older persons alike are becoming more aware of this problem and its alternatives, such as better diet, more exercise. So the problem is not being ignored.

I am pleased you read my column. Keep up your good work at the seniors home.

Write Jolayne Farrell at PO Box 66, Postal Station G., 1075 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

volunteers

VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY — Lawyer with malpractice insurance who is able to work with people under stress is needed by Legal Alternatives for Women (L.A.W.) of the National Council of Jewish Women to supervise volunteers and attend volunteer meetings. One shift per month, from 6-9 p.m. Monday or Wednesday, or 1-4 p.m. or Thursday. Phone 642-7272.

CHILD CARE WORKER — Women's Survival Center, Pontiac, needs volunteer, 18 and older who likes kids, during teens' parenting classes 2-5 p.m., Friday. Also need someone to assist child care worker during legal seminars, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday or Wednesday. Phone 642-7272.

TRAIL GUIDES — Nature-loving volunteers,

age 16-80, are sought by Dinosaur Hill Nature Preserve, Rochester, to take small groups of children on preserve walks and attend monthly workshop. One-half day per week and 1/4 day workshop. Volunteers are needed Wednesday or Thursday morning or afternoon or Friday morning. Phone 642-7272.

For more information about these and other volunteer openings, call the bureau at 642-7272.

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