

SWEET SOLITUDE

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You're strolling along with your friends and you see a boy having lunch alone in the corner of the cafeteria or absorbed in a book in a cranny of the library. You think, "I wonder why he's sitting there all alone. He must not have many friends."

Although that lone luncher/reader may not have chosen his solitary status, he may also *want* to be alone. Experts agree that, contrary to popular belief, few very solitary people are unhappy or disturbed. Everybody needs some time alone, and some need more time than others.

Taking some time for solitude--some time to relax, to think, or to kindle your creative energies--isn't going to isolate you from humanity or turn you into a recluse or hermit. Some things are often best done alone--like reading a novel or writing in your journal. With all these things to do, being alone doesn't have to mean being lonely.

Balancing public and private worlds--

As a young person, you especially need time away from parents, teachers, and friends in order to figure out who you are and what you want to do. Alone, you can sort through the possibilities without being influenced by other people's spoken--or unspoken--opinions. Maybe you feel like you're on an emotional roller-coaster; quiet and privacy will help you get back on a more level plane. In your teen years, you'll make a lot of decisions in a short time that will affect you for a long time. It's hard to make them wisely if you never sit down alone by yourself and think.

Being alone is an ability that doesn't always come easily. "The capacity to be alone," writes Anthony Storr, author of *Solitude: A Return to the Self*, "is as much an aspect of emotional maturity as the capacity to make mature relationships on equal terms." Some "introverted" people always find plenty to do when they are alone, and they rarely feel lonely. On the other hand, some "social butterflies" have to make many emotional leaps before they learn to fly happily on their own. You can be too alone, or too dependent on the companionship and approval of others. Happiness, it seems, is gained by achieving the proper balance between both your private world and public world.

Tapping your inner resources--

Much research has been done to investigate the positive physical and psychological effects of solitude. The following are just a few of the good things solitude can do for you:

- *Expand your sense of self.* Alone, you can peel away the public layers and find out who you really are and how you fit into the world, giving yourself a chance to establish what Dolores Curran, in *Traits of a Healthy Family*, calls your "private being".
- *Control your own destiny.* In your life of 200-student study halls and three-in-a-seat school buses, it's nice to have some space away from the watchful eye of Anybody and controlling influence of Anything. Your school curriculum may be planned out for the next four years, but alone you can set your own agendas, giving you more of a sense of control over your life. Without this degree of autonomy, you can feel suffocated and resentful.
- *Raise your grades.* One 1981 study showed that students who practiced meditation or relaxation techniques before studying and taking exams achieved higher grades than those who didn't take quiet

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time for private relaxation and reflection. Students in this University of Chicago study said during their time alone they enjoyed heightened powers of concentration and lengthened attention spans.

- *Become inspired and imaginative.* The imagination can flourish in solitude. When you're all by yourself with no distractions, you can fantasize. No story was ever written, no song ever composed, no invention ever invented without first visualization by its creator. When you run into a problem that seems unsolvable, "sleeping on it"--taking time alone either in sleep or quiet relaxation--can help you find creative solutions. You don't have to be a poet or painter; say you want to design a costume or come up with a football strategy--mental seclusion can be the best context for both visualizing and revising your plans.

- *Feel less stress.* Dr. Peter Suedfeld, psychology professor and dean at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, says it has been demonstrated that people placed in special quiet atmospheres have an increase in the alpha waves that are associated with well being, and a decrease in levels of cortisone, the hormone secreted in response to stress.

- *Become more fun to be around.* In a study at the University of Chicago, 75 volunteer high school students were tested regarding the amount of time they spent alone and the effect it had on their moods. Those who spent more than one-quarter of their waking hours by themselves reported they felt in better spirits later when they were with other people.

Creating solitary spaces

Solitude doesn't mean isolation. Solitude can be achieved even when other people are in the house--or the park, the library, or the lunchroom. You don't need to find a solitary place as much as a place that is simply away from your usual routine, inhibitions, and expectations. Absorption in your own thoughts is more important than the place or the silence.

For some, solitude is just a state of mind. If you're a *screener*, a person who can filter out background noise, you can enjoy being alone almost anywhere--even in the midst of crowds.

If you're a *non-screener*, one who is acutely aware of all the noise and activity that goes on around you, you'll need more isolation and quiet in order to find solitude. In either case, you'll probably have to carve out your own solitary moments, because in today's go-go-go world, they aren't just going to happen. Some of these suggestions might help:

- A favorite spot--a park bench, a living room chair, or a nook in the library--when reserved for only solitary activities, can condition your mind to shut everything out and get in a creative or meditative mood.

- Music, whether you're making it or listening to it, can absorb you or provide background to your thinking. If you want to use your private time for creative writing, however, pick music that won't distract you. You don't want to be thinking about the words to a song you are listening to, but conjuring up the words to your own song!

- Exercise transports you away from it all. When you're jogging, few people are going to break your stride to strike up a conversation. On a bicycle, you're even more difficult to talk to. There are many solitary sports--swimming, cross-country skiing--that allow you to exercise your body while you clear your mind.

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- If you share a room, establish at least a corner for yourself. Let your roommate know that when you're in your corner, you're to be left alone.

- Furnish your room to cut down noise so you'll be more insulated from the world. Noise bounces off hard surfaces and is absorbed by cushions, rugs, and drapes.

The busy life of the mind--

Now that you're alone, what are you going to do? First of all, you don't have to do anything. Secondly, even if it looks physically like you're just watching the grass grow, you can be doing a lot of mind-bending mental work.

You can use your time alone to meditate and clear your mind of all thoughts and concerns. You can also use your time alone to be creative. Write in a journal. Load your camera and take some pictures. Improvise on a musical instrument. Experiment with paints. Make up a poem, a song, a story. Do whatever the rest of your day doesn't allow you to do that's itching to be done. "Many ordinary interests, and the majority of creative pursuits involving real originality, continue without involving relationships," says Storr. Take time in your private time to pursue further both the ordinary and extraordinary things that interest you.

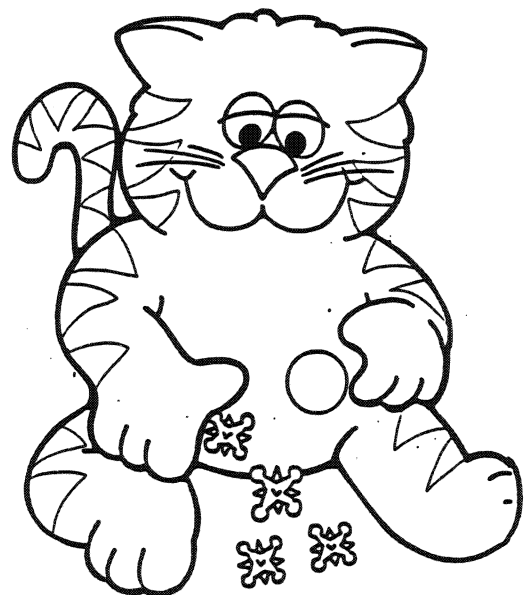
To thine own self be true--

A lot of people may be influencing your life at every turn now, but you will basically make your life's journey alone. In the end, you call the shots. You determine who you are, you make it all happen. By learning how to be alone now, you'll learn to recognize your inner voice when it says, "Get me out of here! I need some space to think!" And you'll know how to navigate that journey. Spend some time with yourself. Learn to like yourself. You have a long way to go together.

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I-B-75



Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

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1. Who needs solitude? _____
2. Taking the time for solitude--some time to _____, to _____, or _____ your _____--isn't going to isolate you from humanity or turn you into a recluse or hermit.
3. Explain the difference between being alone and being lonely. Which one is a positive experience and which one is a negative experience?
Being alone _____

Being lonely _____

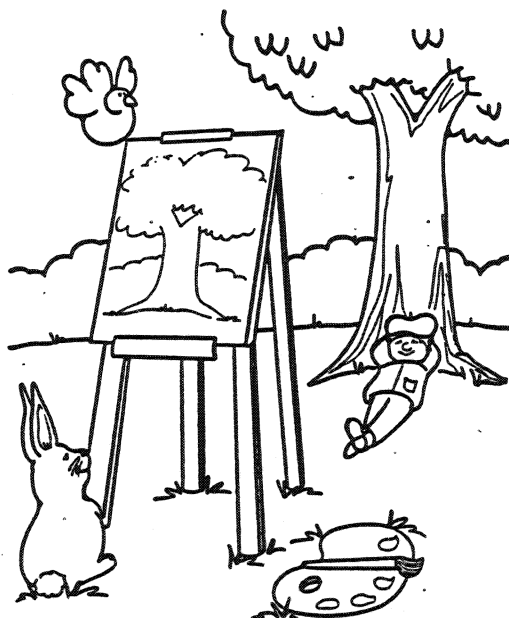
4. Give three reasons why teenagers need time to think--explain your answers.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
5. Happiness is gained by achieving the proper balance between both _____ and _____
6. List six possible benefits of solitude, and explain each briefly.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
7. Can you think of any other possible benefits of solitude for you? List below.
 1. _____
 2. _____
8. Describe the term *solitude*. _____
9. Describe the term *screener*. _____
10. Are you a screener or a non-screener? _____

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11. List six possible ways a non-screener can achieve solitude, and explain briefly.
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
12. Can you think of any other possible ways to achieve solitude?
1. _____
 2. _____
13. Once you are alone, what can you do? Identify at least four things.
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
14. What do you like (or would like) to do alone?
- _____
- _____
15. Explain what the phrase, "To thine own self be true", means.
- _____
- _____



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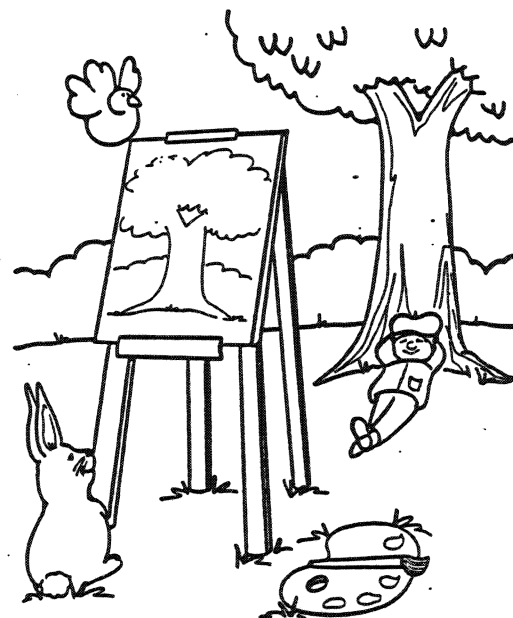
Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

SWEET SOLITUDE - TEACHER KEY

1. Who needs solitude? Everyone does--some more than others
2. Taking the time for solitude--some time to relax, to think, or kindle your creative energies--isn't going to isolate you from humanity or turn you into a recluse or hermit.
3. Explain the difference between being alone and being lonely. Which one is a positive experience and which one is a negative experience?
Being alone Positive Gives an individual an opportunity to think, reflect, and breathe in their own space
Being lonely Negative When a person is truly left alone: a person without a family
4. Give three reasons why teenagers need time to think--explain your answers.
 1. Sort out possibilities without being influenced by others' opinions
 2. Get your life on an even plane and/or stop the roller-coaster ride
 3. A lot of decisions for your future are made now and they need to be right
5. Happiness is gained by achieving the proper balance between both your private world and your public world
6. List six possible benefits of solitude, and explain each briefly.
 1. Expand your sense of self
 2. Control your own destiny
 3. Raise your grades
 4. Become inspired and imaginative
 5. Feel less stress
 6. Become more fun to be around
7. Can you think of any other possible benefits of solitude for you? List below.
 1. _____
 2. _____
8. Describe the term *solitude*. being alone, away from usual routine
9. Describe the term *screener*. a person who can filter out background noise
10. Are you a screener or a non-screener? _____

SWEET SOLITUDE - Page 2 - TEACHER KEY

11. List five possible ways a non-screener can achieve solitude, and explain briefly.
1. Find a favorite spot
 2. Use background music
 3. Use exercise as a means to get away
 4. If you share a room, schedule time alone
 5. Furnish your room to cut down noise
12. Can you think of any other possible ways to achieve solitude?
1. _____
 2. _____
13. Once you are alone, what can you do? Identify at least four things.
1. Think Meditate Reflect
 2. Plan Evaluate Create
 3. Do a project that you've been itching to do
 4. Pursue personal interests
14. What do you like (or would like) to do alone?
- _____
- _____
15. Explain what the phrase, "To thine own self be true," means.
- It's your own life; listen to yourself as well as those around you;
- recognize your inner voice; give yourself the benefit
- _____



SOLITUDE

**TO SPEND
SOME TIME ALONE:
AT PEACE**