

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FEELING LONELY, BEING ALONE. OR BEING REJECTED?

Everyone wants to be liked and accepted by others. Such feelings start during infancy and last a lifetime. Nevertheless, most people feel rejected at one time or another. This can range from a momentary cold shoulder to a permanent exclusion. You can be rejected for something you did or for what you failed to do, or the rejection may come for no obvious reason.

It is a natural part of growing up for friendships to shift and change. For a while at least, certain teens may get left out of a new group that they did not help form.

Being alone differs from being lonely in that one chooses to be alone. Spending time alone by choice can be relaxing, or a time for reflecting and thinking about personal attitudes, goals, etc. Being alone by yourself is not the same as being lonely. Not everyone wants company all the time, and just because someone is alone, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are rejected or lonely. It is good to enjoy your own company sometimes.

Feeling lonely means NOT feeling like you are part of a group, large or small. The lonely person usually feels left out or overlooked altogether when they really want to feel included in the group. Loneliness often gets mixed up with rejection, but they are not the same thing. Rejection means that others prefer not to be with you. When you try to join in, you are shut out. Some lonely adolescents never get rejected because they may not even try to join a group.

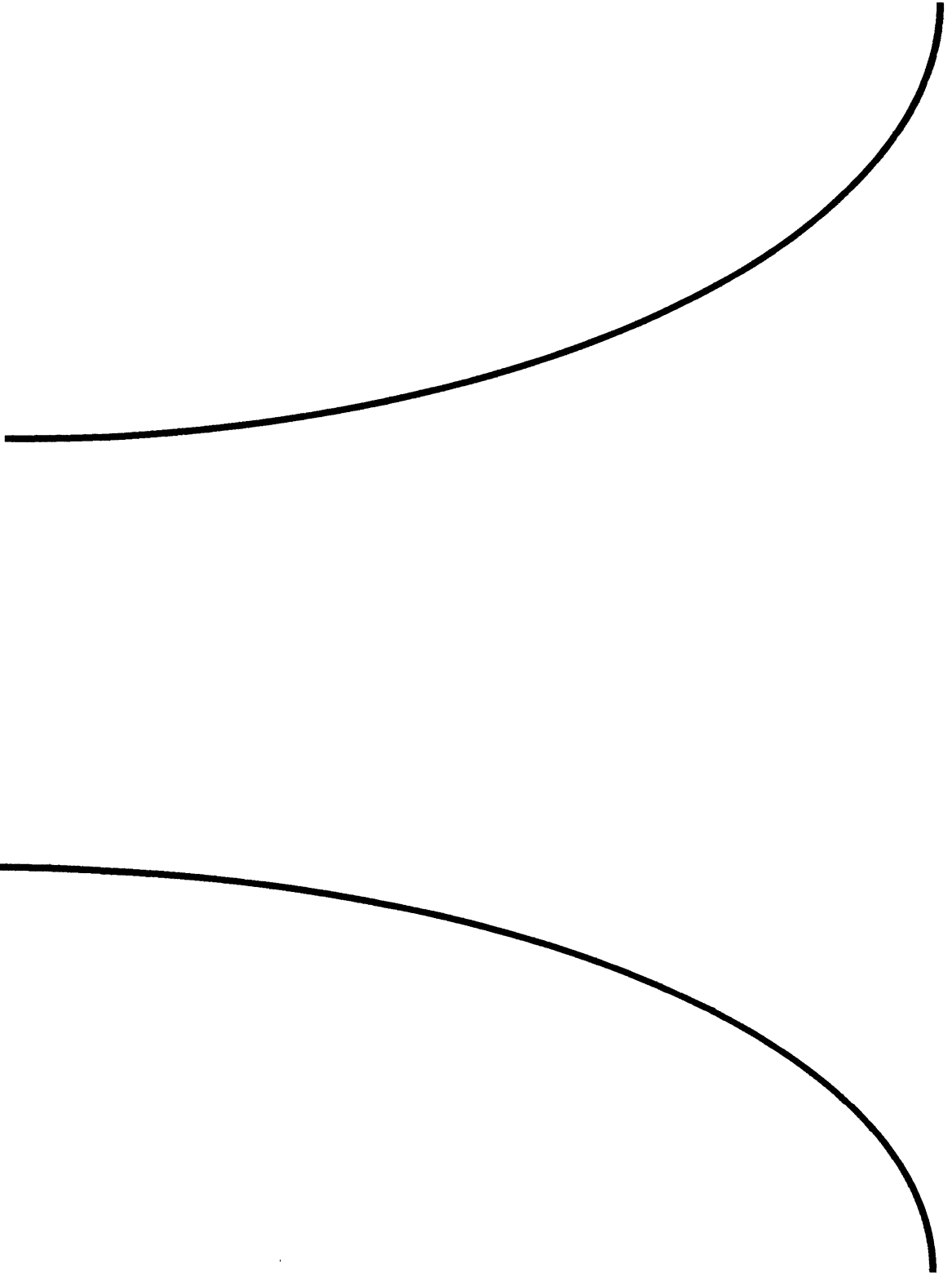
Few people are so popular that they have never felt the sting of being lonely.

Information adapted from ME: Understanding Myself and Others, Riker and Riker, Bennett Publishing, 1982.

REJECTION

BEING ALONE

FEELING LONELY



Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

FEELING LONELY OR BEING ALONE? - PART I

Directions: As the teacher presents the information, complete the following items.

Feeling lonely means: _____

Being alone means: _____

Rejection is: _____

If a person feels lonely a lot, he/she needs to ask themself these questions:

1. _____

For example: _____

2. _____

For example: _____

3. _____

For example: _____

4. _____

For example: _____

5. _____

For example: _____

6. Have you ever felt lonely? _____ What did you do to change that feeling?

7. Have you ever felt alone? _____ Did you enjoy it? _____

8. Have you ever felt rejected by your peers? _____ How did it feel? _____

9. Have you ever been guilty of rejecting someone else and hurting them? _____

FEELING LONELY OR BEING ALONE? - Part II

Directions: Read the following case studies and decide if the teenager is "feeling lonely" or "being alone".

CASE 1: Shelly explains: "There are times when I want to be by myself. I enjoy peace and quiet after being in a crowd of people all day. Sometimes I work on a project around the house, or listen to my favorite music. I can get my activities organized in my mind before I start them."

Shelly is _____.

CASE 2: One Friday night Scott went to a basketball game. As usual, he expected to meet his friends there. Surprisingly, his closest pals seemed cool. Laughing and talking loudly, several guys formed a tight little group and actually turned their backs to Scott. He realized they were talking about him. He left the game and went home. His mother noticed something was wrong and Scott explained. "They left me out. I've done it to other kids, so I know what it means. Why are they mad at me? What did I do?" At school on Monday, Scott ate lunch alone.

Scott is _____.

CASE 3: Angel had many friends and was elected to a class office. She was excited about her new friends she worked with in student government. A few of her old friends didn't like her new popularity and stopped calling her to do things with them.

Angel is _____.

CASE 4: After a busy week Jess decided to stay home on the weekend. He organized his sports closet and cleaned his equipment. With that project finished, he watched a favorite movie on TV and took a nap. His parents asked him if he was feeling ill, but Jess said he was OK.

Jess is _____.

Now go back and give Scott and Angel advice to help them through this lonely phase.
My advice for Scott is: _____

My advice for Angel is: _____

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

REASONS FOR REJECTION

DIRECTIONS: Tell why you think each of the following circumstances and/or behaviors could be a reason for social rejection.

- A. Physical Handicaps - _____
- B. Super Smart - _____
- C. Learning Disabilities - _____
- D. Ethnic Origins - _____
- E. Religious Beliefs - _____
- F. Gender - _____
- G. Geography (where you live) - _____
- H. Family Income - _____
- I. Skill Level - _____
- J. Inappropriate Behaviors - _____
- K. Family Structures - _____

Do you ever feel affected by any of these? _____ If so, what? _____

Do you ever reject others because of these? _____ If so, why? _____

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

REASONS FOR REJECTION - Page 1

Rejection is deep and long lasting. It is suffered by those who are different from average in their health, intelligence, appearance, or behavior. This type of serious rejection cannot be solved by waiting for others to notice positive qualities, trying harder to be friendly, or by correcting a fault in a personality.

Rejection of one person by another always damages human relationships. Prejudice is a form of rejection that means to decide about someone before really knowing them. People who are rejected can learn to dislike themselves and to believe they are worthless. Sometimes they become angry and strike back.

Circumstances or behaviors that might lead to rejection are:

- A. Handicapping conditions:** There are many circumstances in which people feel rejected because of a physical condition.
- 1. Physical Appearance:** Acceptance and success seem to be tied to one's physical appearance. People with average looks, size, etc., are easily accepted into a group. Those who are out of the norm, either very large (due to weight problems or extreme height) or very small, are more likely to be rejected. Worse, those who are sick a lot or are physically handicapped are sometimes left out or simply ignored. Even those mildly disabled may not be invited to group activities, and they may have much to offer in terms of ability or personality.
 - 2. Intelligence:** Average intelligence is the norm. If an individual deviates from that either way, they can feel social pressure that leads to rejection. Having a very high IQ can be hard to deal with as peers often find this type of person overbearing, or boring. Being on the other end of the IQ scale or having a learning disability can lead to name calling and labeling can also cause feelings of rejection.
- B. Ethnic Origins:** It would be difficult to reach adolescence without picking up certain feelings or attitudes towards races other than our own. Ethnic groups are usually in the minority and "different than the norm". The majority feels uncomfortable around "the unfamiliar" and prejudices begin.
(Refer to materials and activities in Unit I Topic D on ethnocentrism.)
- C. Religious Beliefs:** Religion is a very personal issue. Some people feel threatened or uneasy when others hold differing views about sacred beliefs such as the nature of deity, is there a deity, how one should worship, etc. Some tend to see another person's views on religion as "If you don't believe what I believe, then you think I'm wrong and I'm not!" This attitude can lead to exclusion or rejection.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION
REASONS FOR REJECTION - Page 2

- D. Gender:** Long held stereotypes of male and female roles fuel the issues of women in the workplace, equal pay for equal work, domestic responsibilities, gender equity, sexual harassment, etc. Attitudes have greatly improved in the last few decades, but many people, both male and female, still deal with gender inequality.
- E. Geography and Socioeconomics:** Where a person lives has always made a difference in opinions about that person. These are related to cost of homes in the area, types of business in the area, and the socioeconomics of the neighborhood. There are always good and not so good elements in every area-- a high income doesn't guarantee someone is a good person or neighbor, etc.
- F. Skill level:** Do you remember ever being chosen last as teams take sides? Then you will relate to rejection based on skill level. In our competitive society much emphasis is placed on skill. Skills come from a combination of genetics and practice.
- G. Inappropriate Behavior:** This sets one away from the norm, causes embarrassment within social groups and drives others away to "safer friends".
- H. Family Structure:** In the 50's, to belong to a divorced family was a social stigma. The changes seen in the family structure in the 90's are usually met with social tolerance. Occasionally, certain family situations (e.g., multiple divorces, abuse, polygamy, etc.), draw a family into the "out of the norm" category and into the area of prejudice and rejection.

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER!

Rate the conditions listed below on a scale of 1 to 12:

No. 1 = most acceptable and No. 12 = least acceptable.

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| _____ Chain smoker | _____ Mentally handicapped |
| _____ Visually impaired | _____ Quadriplegic |
| _____ Hearing impaired | _____ Ex-convict |
| _____ Substance abuser | _____ Extremely overweight |
| _____ Elderly | _____ Severe stutterer |
| _____ Dead person | _____ AIDS victim |

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PERSONAL PREJUDICES

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LISA

Lauren and Tara had no idea that the lesson about the value of each individual would be powerfully taught during the summer of girls camp. Maybe, if Lauren had known, she would have excitedly prepared for the dreaded adventure of one week without a shower. The only thing that made camp bearable was the opportunity it provided for practical jokes. Have you ever had the surprise provided by plastic wrap stretched over the toilet seat? Just when you thought the one holer was the safest place in camp, honey topped the list of screams when it was applied ever so lightly over the plastic.

Tara and Lauren delighted in the thrill of victory as each tomfoolery was carried out to perfection. They were well on their way armed with 20 rolls of toilet paper to make their mark on the neighboring camp when they heard someone crying in the bushes. Curiosity overcame the pair and they began to investigate. They discovered a young Japanese girl crying all alone.

"What's wrong?" asked Lauren. "I can't take it anymore," said the young girl. "Take what?" inquired Tara. "The name calling: Jap, yellow skin, chink, slant eye. I want to go home," the girl sadly replied. "Home is a very long way away," exclaimed Lauren. "I don't care," replied the girl. "I want to go home."

Lauren and Tara exchanged glances and Tara replied, "We have a extra bunk in our tent. Why don't you stay with us for the rest of the week?" The girl looked at the two with disbelief. "You want me to stay with you?" said the girl. "Yes!" replied both girls in unison. "Let's clear it with our leaders," stated Lauren.

So that is how Lauren and Tara came to meet Lisa. As the girls helped Lisa settle into the tent, they began to learn some very interesting things about their new roommate. Lisa was an accomplished pianist and spoke several languages. She had lived in many countries throughout the world and would put the girls to sleep at night recalling all of her adventures. Lisa could paint, write poetry, and the girl was only 16 years old!

The day of the big hike came. All of the girls put on their hiking gear to spend the day on the trail. They returned in the evening exhausted and Tara fell in anguish on her bunk. "I'm so tired. Every muscle and bone aches in my body," moaned Tara.

Lisa replied; "Turn on your stomach!" "What?" questioned Tara. "Turn on your stomach!" said Lisa again. Tara obeyed and Lisa's hands began to move expertly up and down the length of Tara in the art of Japanese massage. The girls were amazed at the speed and adeptness with which Lisa performed this task. Soon all were in line waiting their turn.

LISA - Page 2

"How did you learn how to do this?" inquired Lauren. "Every evening when my father comes home from work, he removes his shoes and it becomes my duty to give him a massage," Lisa replied. From that point on, in the evening every girl would line up to have all of the aches and pains of the day removed.

Camp came to a quick close. All of the girls said tearful goodbyes--each glad they had met each other. Addresses and phone numbers were exchanged with promises to keep in touch.

A few weeks passed when Tara received a phone call from Lisa. "My mom wants all of the girls that were in the tent at camp to come over for a sleepover. She wants to thank you for being so kind to me!" stated Lisa.

"Did you tell your mother how crazy we all are?" asked Tara. "Yes," laughed Lisa. "She told me that you can come anyway!" So it became Tara's task to round up the girls from camp and take sleeping bags and bodies over to Lisa's house that was several miles away.

When the girls arrived at their destination, Lauren rang the doorbell. After a short delay, a beautiful Japanese woman appeared who looked like a porcelain doll. Her hair was beautifully done with picks and ornate combs in the top knot. She bowed. The girls were a little puzzled as to what to do. Looking at each other questioningly, on cue, they bowed in unison.

Then the beautiful lady called, "Risa, Risa!" and spoke in Japanese. Lisa appeared at the door. "Hi guys!" she said, "Come on in." They obediently followed her into her immaculately kept home and invaded the living room. They were considered the honored guests. Dinner was served in traditional Japanese style on the floor with a dish from each country where Lisa's family had lived. During dinner, Lisa played the piano and read some of the poetry she had written. They talked and laughed all night long, enjoying each other's company.

Early in the morning, Lisa's mother got up and fixed an elaborate breakfast to further honor the guests. The girls were in awe that they would be the recipients of such tribute. They were just plain, ordinary teenagers (or so they felt)!

The girls said a gracious goodbye and started home. During the drive, the girls reflected on their newfound friend. "Isn't it sad that people reject others just because they are different?" they said. The girls who rejected Lisa at camp were the losers--they lost out on the culture that Lisa could bring into their lives. Lauren and Tara were richer, happier, and better individuals because of Lisa.

LISA - Page 2

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TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE WAYS TO COPE

Discuss these concepts with the class:

If a person feels lonely a lot, he/she needs to ask themself these questions:

- 1. Do I belong with the group I want to join?**
Try to remember that few people are always left out, just as few are always picked. If you feel "on the fringe" all of the time, and left out most of the time, it may be time to look to a new group of friends. Forcing your way into a group may leave you feeling "in", but not accepted.
- 2. Do I make the first move to be friendly or pay attention to others?**
Wishing that others would pay attention to you does not solve the problem of feeling alone. It may be easy for some to blame others for your loneliness and feel resentful for your isolation. A better attitude would be to take action and do something positive to replace those lonely feelings.
- 3. Do I miss opportunities for friendship?**
Sometimes lonely persons search for friendship with blinders on. They don't seek anyone who isn't just the right age, sex, color, or social class. They may be so exclusive in demands that chances for friendships may be lost.
- 4. Do I invest in others?**
A well-known cure for loneliness is to offer companionship to others. Get involved in a project for someone else's benefit. Of course, it isn't easy to spend time and energy for others when you are the lonely one. From your viewpoint, others should show concern for you. Yet when people who feel alone reach out to others who are even more lonely--the aged, shut ins, children in hospitals, etc.--they usually feel very good about it. Sometimes close ties and friendships follow.
- 5. Do I build resources in myself?**
Crafts and hobbies can play an important part in life. Such activities are not limited to either sex or age. Taking up a new sport, developing reading or computer skills, learning a new hobby, or joining a group are just a few ideas.

The answers to all of these questions lead to ways to initiate friendships. If they are explored, examined, and applied, friendships should prevail!

CONSIDER THESE THINGS:

- 1. DO I BELONG WITH THE GROUP I WANT TO JOIN?**
- 2. DO I MAKE THE FIRST MOVE TO BE FRIENDLY OR PAY ATTENTION TO OTHERS?**
- 3. DO I MISS OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRIENDSHIP?**
- 4. DO I INVEST IN OTHERS?**
- 5. DO I BUILD RESOURCES IN MYSELF?**