



## Tips to Address Loneliness in Older Adults

**Provide education** - Faith communities offer participants a variety of recognized faith tools, like prayer and fellowship, that can be leveraged to reach out to those in need of connection. Using these faith tools in conjunction with education that recognizes loneliness as part of the human experience provides a vocabulary and safe space for addressing feelings of loneliness. It's also important to share that loneliness is not an inevitable part of aging, rather it is a signaling feeling that invites us to actively engage with others.

**Create opportunities for volunteers** - Whether volunteers are being asked to serve other group members or the larger community, service is a tool that increases connection. Older adults are often transitioning from a working environment where worth is based on the ability to produce. Creating new connections and ways to identify themselves as valuable members of a community is important in providing a sense of belonging. Serving as a group at a local food bank or at the local library provides connection to the group as well as connection to the community. Likewise, inviting group members to serve the congregation of which they are a part deepens connections within the faith community. Teaching Sunday School, helping prepare communion, or joining a prayer team, the possibility of engaging older adults in ministry is extensive.

**Engage participants with personal growth opportunities** - Offer programming that engages creativity and encourages personal growth to help older adults develop new skills, insights, and connections. Add to the impact of existing programming by exploring ways to increase opportunities for creativity. Trying something new or exploring how a particular topic speaks to them personally and sharing insights with others are ways to foster connection for older adults. These opportunities for learning and growing together in active ways foster a deeper connection than passive activities like worship or attending a committee meeting.

**Enlist participants in decision making** - Older adults are experienced decision makers. They know what they like and want to do. By doing ministry with older adults rather than for older adults we deepen relationships, commitment, and meaning. By offering opportunities for everyone to feel invested in programming at every level we create more connections with the faith-based organization and with the people who are part of each activity.

**Be intentional** – Relationship building is not a side effect of attending a service or study. Building relationships is an intentional product of participation. The way we think about time and participation matters at every level. Taking time to think about how new and ongoing activities address the need for connection and foster relationship building among older adults is an intentional step to decrease loneliness.

**Look outward** - Every organization has things they do well and things they can improve. By tapping into the strengths of those around us and participating with them we all become stronger. Community organizations, other churches, and government agencies are all places to look for resources and support when trying to provide opportunities for connection among older adults.

See also - *Loneliness and Isolation in Faith Communities: Best Practices for Creating Connection and Community*

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