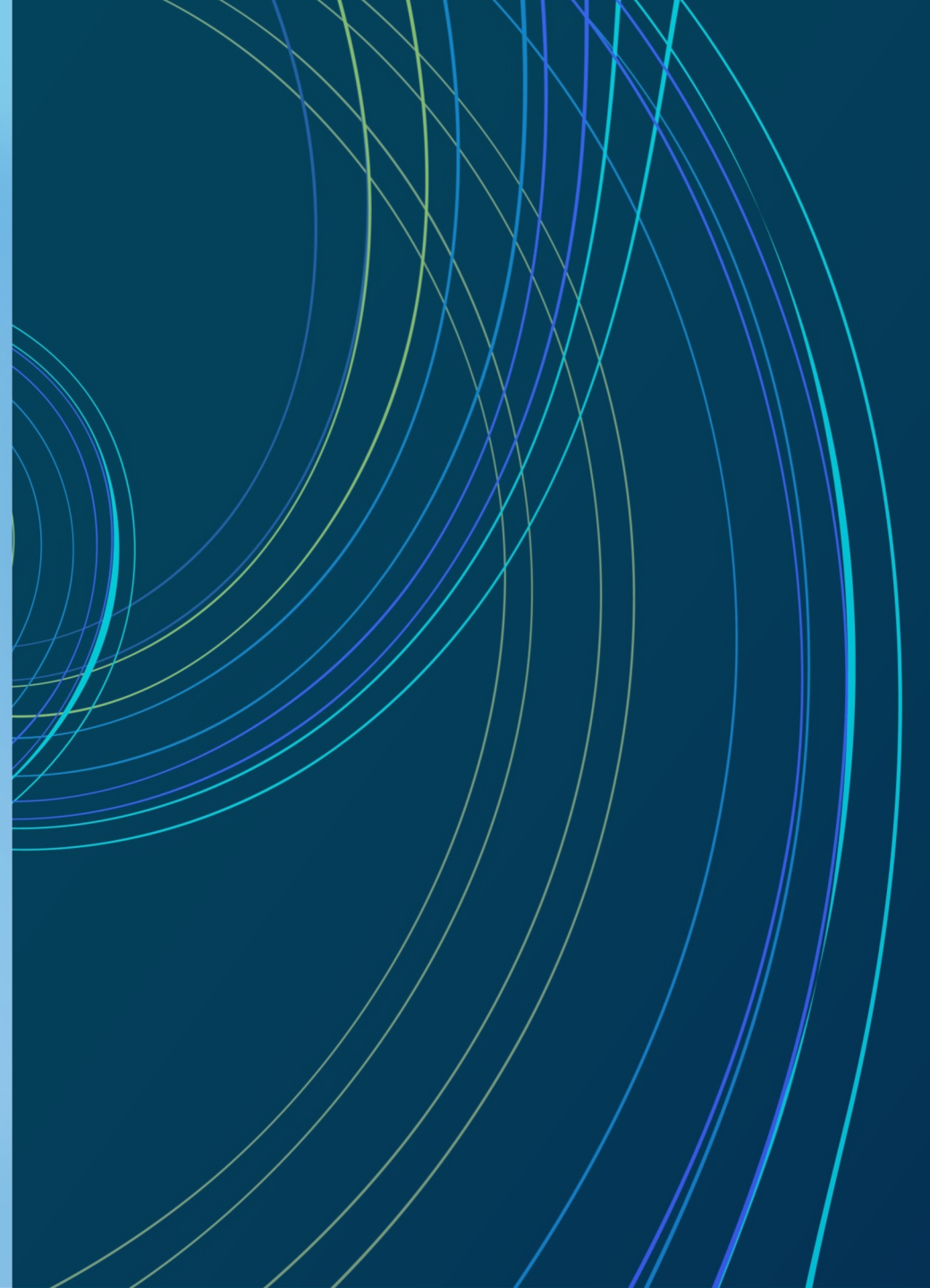


# Mental Health Awareness

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# Objectives

To learn about mental health trends in college

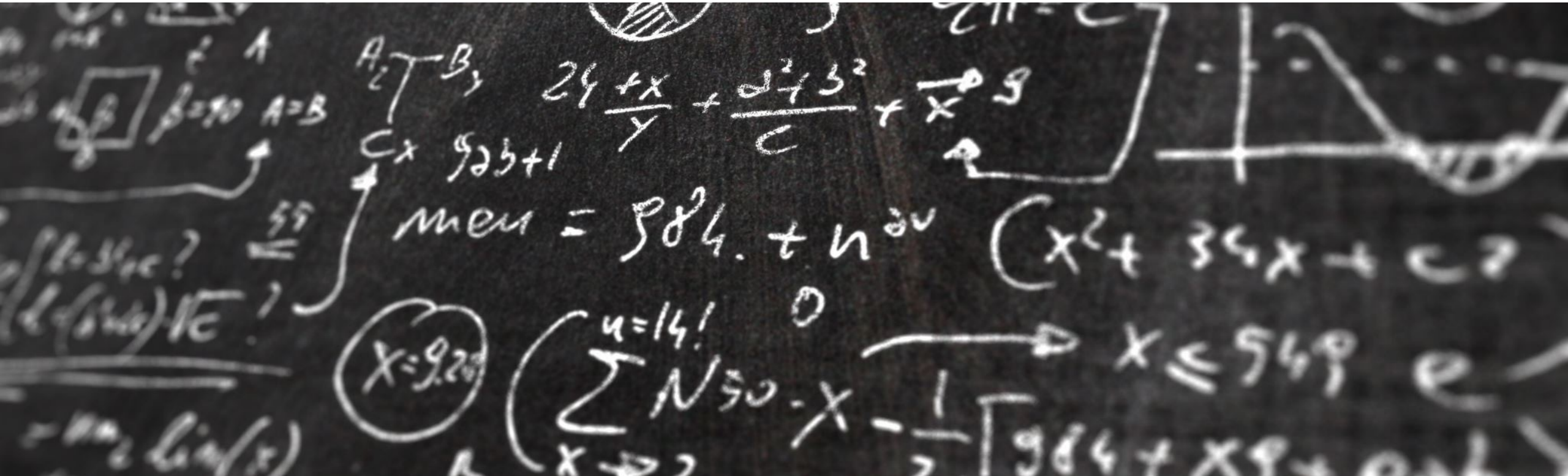
To learn signs of anxiety, depression and suicide

To learn how to help a friend

To learn about resources on and off campus

# Observations on the Human Condition

- We all struggle
- Individual reactions to stress differ
- We tend to keep our struggles to ourselves
- Our attempts to cope with struggles often make the situation worse
- Our attempts to help others by "fixing the problem" most often are not helpful



# The Data

- 34% of Graduate Students reported seeking mental health services within the last year
- Negatively impacted academic performance:
  - 36.3% Procrastination
  - 30.8% Stress
  - 24.8% Anxiety
  - 19.2% Finances
  - 16.4% Sleep
  - 16.3% Depression
- 27.6% of students reported stress as high
- 30.4% have been diagnosed with anxiety
- 23.3% have been diagnosed with depression
- 46.6% of students reported loneliness
- 20% of students reported suicidal ideation

# Signs of *Excessive* Anxiety...

## BEHAVIORS/PHYSICAL

- Physical disruptions: upset stomach, dizziness, racing heart, sweating, dry mouth
- Ritualistic or compulsive behaviors
- Shakiness
- Avoiding eye contact
- Fidgeting
- Avoiding social situations
- Panic attacks
- Sleep disturbance

## THOUGHTS/FEELINGS

- Obsessing or ruminating
- Unrealistic or excessive worry
- Unrealistic fears (phobias)
- Sense of being overwhelmed
- Worst case scenarios
- Flashbacks associated with trauma
- Discomfort with ambiguity
- Disruption in functioning around transitions

# Signs of Depression

- Mood
- Decreased pleasure/interest
- Weight changes
- Sleep disturbance
- Loss of motivation/fatigue
- Impaired cognitive functioning
- Worthlessness/guilt
- Psychomotor agitation/retardation
- Thoughts of ending life
- Hopelessness/Helplessness



# Behavioral Issues

- Attempts to escape from suffering
  - Over-functioning
    - Exercise, Planning, Organizing, Commitments, Jobs
  - Substance Abuse
  - Sleep
  - Distraction
    - Video games
    - Facebook
  - Self Harm
    - Cutting
    - Burning
    - Hair pulling
    - Disordered Eating
  - Suicide
    - Note: Self harm behaviors and suicide are two different issues
    - BUT self harm is a risk factor for suicide attempts



# When to be Concerned

How are they functioning?

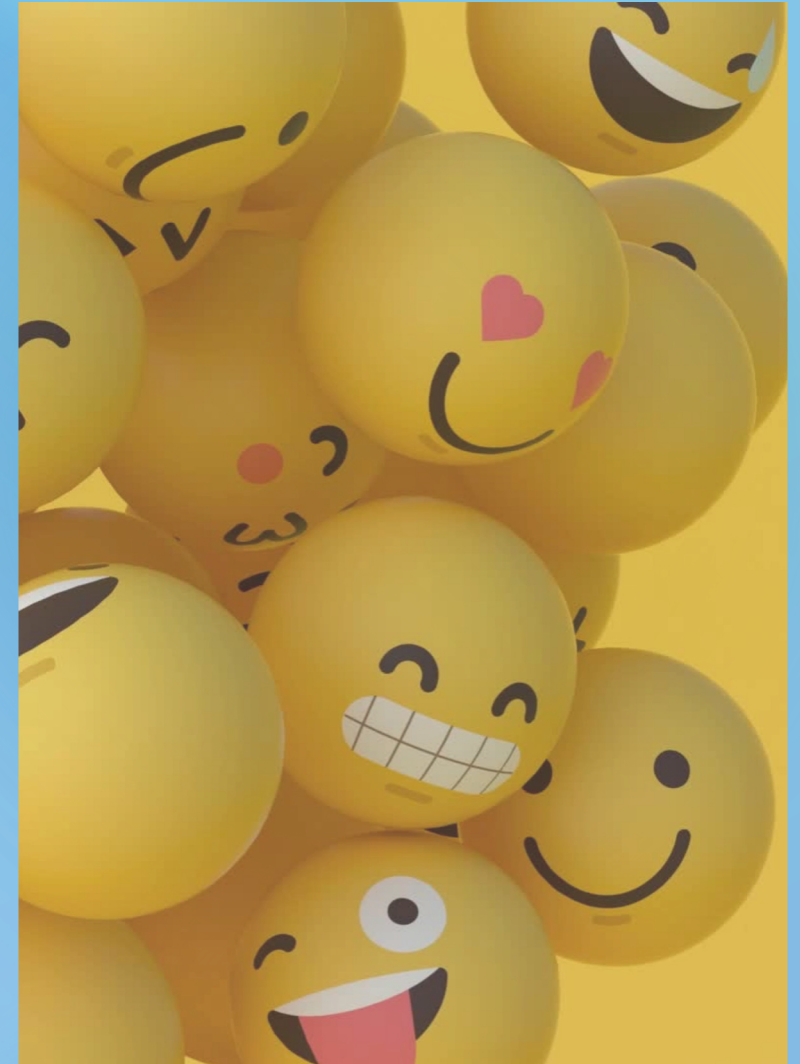
Are you concerned about safety?

How are others in the community being impacted?



# Notice the warning signs online

- **Keep an eye out for these signs that could indicate your friend is struggling with their mental health:**
  - Posting captions, hashtags, or emojis that are overtly sad or negative- they go beyond sarcastic jokes.
  - Liking posts or following accounts that promote negative behaviors– even if they aren't sharing it to their feeds.
  - Writing posts or comments that show impulsive behavior, irritability, hostility, or indicate insomnia.



# Concerns about Safety

- Warning signs for suicide
  - Disconnection/isolation
  - Direct or indirect verbal clues
  - Behavioral clues
  - Situational clues



# How to Help



It's okay to share your concern. You are not being nosey, rude or meddling.



Share your concern. Ex. I'm worried about you because you sleep all the time now and don't seem happy.



Start with a general open statement. How are things going? Do you want to talk? I'm worried about you.



Listen. Don't interrupt, offer advice, judge or try to help solve their problems. Let them know you care, you are there to support them and you want to help.



Have resources available.

# Resources

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Counseling Services, located in Roosevelt Hall, 401-874-2288

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Psychological Consultation Center, located in Chafee, 401-874-4263

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Couple and Family Therapy Clinic, 2 Lower College Rd, 401-874-5956

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TELUS 24/7 Support Line 1-844-584-1027

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URI Health Services, The Potter Building, 6 Butterfield Rd, 401-874-2246

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Call 988: Suicide and crisis hotline

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"Report it" Page at URI for concerns for friends or yourself:  
<https://web.uri.edu/deanofstudents/report-it/>

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[www.seizetheawkward.org](http://www.seizetheawkward.org)

# **THRIVING TOGETHER:**

## **COMMUNITY BUILDING FOR GRAD STUDENTS**

Jordan Scott, Graduate Student Success Coach

The Graduate Writing Center

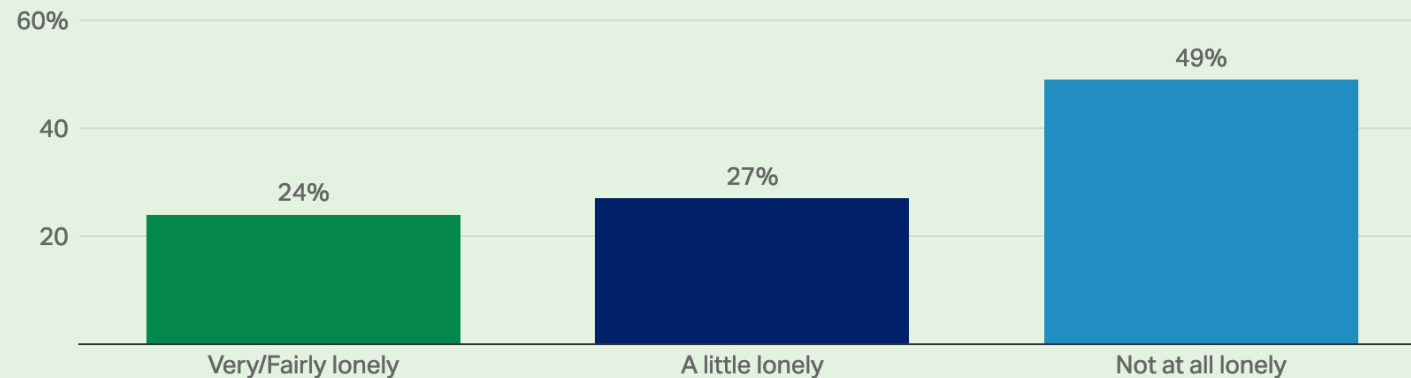
The University of Rhode Island

[academic\\_consulting@etal.uri.edu](mailto:academic_consulting@etal.uri.edu)

# A SURVEY ON LONELINESS

## A Quarter of Adults Worldwide Feel Very or Fairly Lonely

In general, how lonely do you feel?



Across 142 countries and territories surveyed

Global percentages are weighted to reflect the global population. Percentages may not sum to 100% as "Don't know" and no response percentages are not shown.

[Get the data](#) • [Download image](#)

GALLUP

Nearly one in four people worldwide—which translates into more than a billion people—feel very or fairly lonely, according to a recent Meta-Gallup survey of more than 140 countries.

## HOW LONELINESS IMPACTS YOUNGER POPULATIONS

Global results indicate that the lowest rates of feeling lonely are reported among older adults (aged 65 and older), with 17% feeling very or fairly lonely, while the **highest rates of feeling lonely are reported among young adults (aged 19 to 29), with 27% feeling very or fairly lonely.**



## YOUNG ADULTHOOD & LIFE CHANGES

- Dr. Ami Rokach, a clinical psychologist, said that younger people who are in a transitional stage of becoming an adult experience more uncertainty in many areas of life, including:
  - a tumultuous love life
  - uncertainty about a professional path
  - and in the process of separating from family or a community
- Young adults are therefore more likely to experience more loneliness than older adults who have already accumulated “wisdom, friends, a family which may be supportive, and a community which cares for them.”



## HOW LONELINESS MIGHT EXIST IN GRAD SCHOOL

- Coursework, exam prep, and dissertation stages can consume a lot of time
- Graduate Assistant roles on top of other grad work can leave you feeling like you don't have much extra time to socialize
- You don't feel like you're a good fit in your cohort (grad school year) or dept
- Relocating to a new state/country can mean having to form all new social connections
- You may not have adequate transport to attend the activities you want to
- Reading and writing can be a solitary activity
- Research and lab work can also feel isolating
- Competitiveness may hinder the formation of supportive social networks
- The financial burden of graduate school may make it hard to justify attending social events that cost \$

# Being Alone Doesn't Mean You're Lonely

## ALONE

Feels connected to others

Content with solitude

Feelings of happiness and stability

## LONELY

Feels empty and disconnected

Longs for company

Feelings of sadness or depression

## “THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC”

refers to the increasing  
prevalence of loneliness and  
social isolation in modern society

# “THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC”

## **Factors that contribute to this include:**

- The loss of “third spaces” AKA spaces that are not home (first space) or work (second space)
  - These include libraries, coffee shops, public parks, bookstores, community centers...
- The COVID-19 Pandemic and spending long periods of time isolated/indoors
- Unhealthy relationships with social media (e.g.: “doomscrolling” or “passive scrolling”)
- The hyperconnectivity facilitated by technology resulting in a lack of face-to-face engagement

# LONELINESS IMPACTS YOUR HEALTH



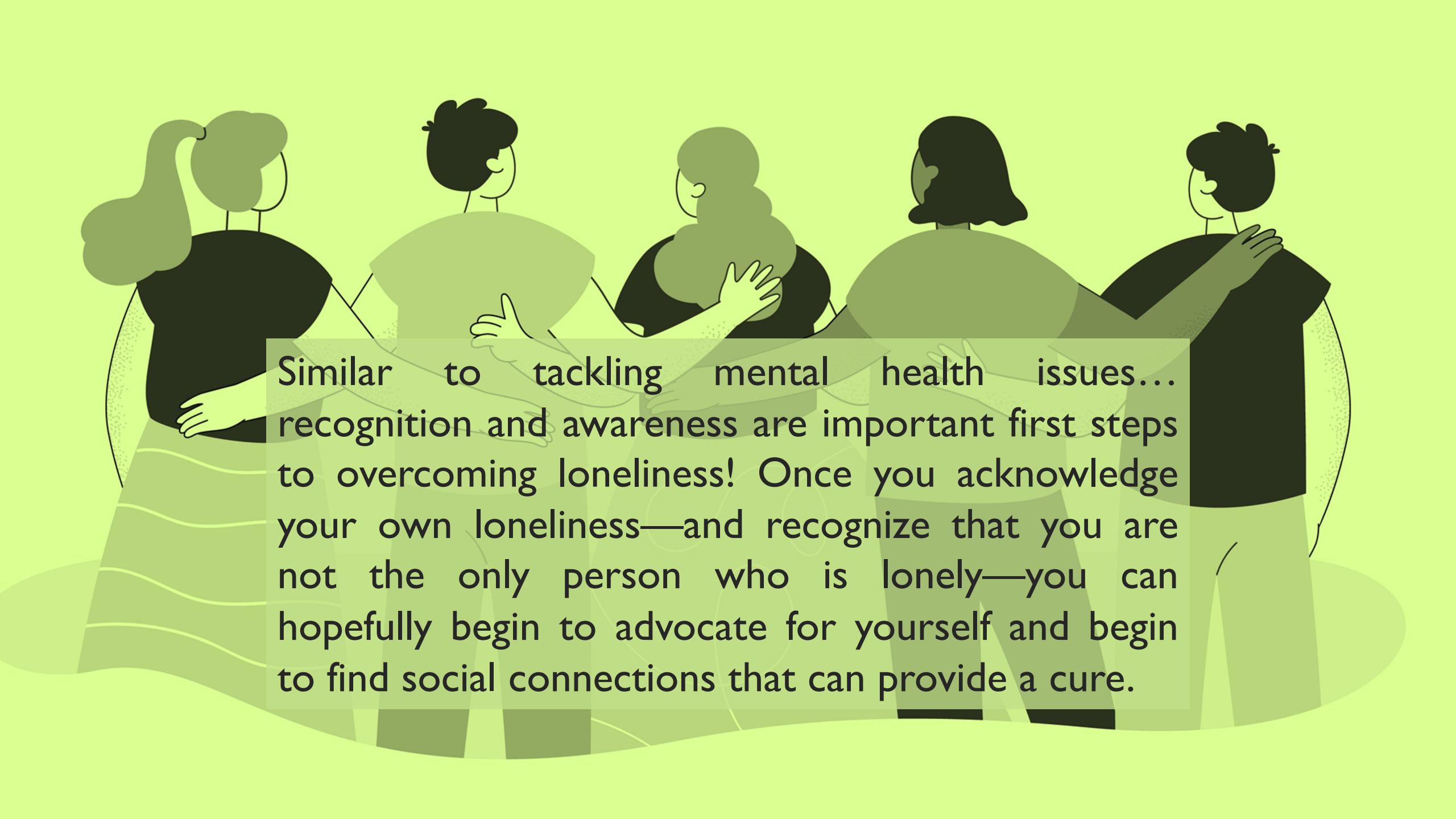
- **Loneliness can lead to...**
  - An increased risk of heart disease
  - Dementia
  - Stroke
  - High blood pressure
  - A weakened immune system
  - Anxiety and/or depression
  - Cognitive decline, including Alzheimer's disease
  - ...and even premature death!

## THE BIOLOGY OF LONELINESS

- Loneliness may alter the tendency of cells in the immune system to promote inflammation, which is necessary to help our bodies heal from injury
- Inflammation that lasts too long increases the risk of chronic diseases
- People who feel lonely may also have weakened immune cells that have trouble fighting off viruses...
- ...which makes them more vulnerable to some infectious diseases

# THE CURE: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS



An illustration of five diverse people standing in a circle, hugging each other. The people are rendered in a simple, stylized manner with various hair colors and styles. The background is a solid light green color. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid in the center, containing text.

Similar to tackling mental health issues... recognition and awareness are important first steps to overcoming loneliness! Once you acknowledge your own loneliness—and recognize that you are not the only person who is lonely—you can hopefully begin to advocate for yourself and begin to find social connections that can provide a cure.



## WAYS TO BECOME MORE CONNECTED

- Attend a [non-academic] class to gain a new skill (pottery, cooking, playing the guitar...)
- Look for volunteer opportunities in your area
- Attend literary events at local bookstores or libraries
- Take a free class at a local library
- If you have a musical or performance-based talent, find a local open mic
- Attend a group therapy session
- Find a local board game night
- Find an adult sports/athletic/intramural league to play in (or social gym like Crossfit)
- Find outdoor activity groups to join, such as hiking
- <https://www.meetup.com/> has lots of groups based on hobbies and interests

**Most importantly... making new connections requires proactiveness & commitment!  
You may not make a new friend the first time you do one of the above—but stick with it!**

# SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AT URI



- Joining the GAU (Graduate Assistants United) and attending their events
  - <https://www.urigau.org/>
- Joining the GSA (Graduate Student Association) which also holds events
  - <https://web.uri.edu/gsa/>
- Attending events that cater to grad students:
  - [https://events.uri.edu/calendar?event\\_types%5B%5D=37216747962729](https://events.uri.edu/calendar?event_types%5B%5D=37216747962729)
- Connecting with offices or centers on campus that might speak to other aspects of your identity:
  - The Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS)
  - The Gender and Sexuality Center

# WAYS TO MAINTAIN CONNECTIONS

- Making a list of people who you care about, and trying to find 15 minutes each day to speak to one of these people
- Be honest with people in your life that you're suffering from loneliness and looking for new or deeper social connections
  - Opening up to people about your feelings of loneliness can help increase the quality and strengthen the function of that relationship and increase your feelings of belonging
- When you do have face-to-face meetings, purposefully work to put your devices (i.e.: phone) away and give other parties your full attention
- Acknowledge that making new connection might require a change in attitude and a willingness and openmindedness to meet new people. You might also want to consider some mental health and/or wellness services, like all the ones we have at URI:
  - <https://web.uri.edu/healthservices/mental-health-and-wellness/>



## FINAL ACTIVITY: BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE

- We will spend a few minutes quietly writing to ourselves about what we've learned today and make a 'game plan' toward seeking mental health support, wellness opportunities, new social connections, and opportunities to keep our loneliness at bay. Feel free to jot on a piece of paper or a Word/Google Doc.
- **Consider:**
- What you've learned about yourself today.
- How you may use support systems (inside and outside URI) to help you.
- Making at least one solution-oriented goal to improve your quality of life.



THANK YOU!

