

The Ache of Loneliness

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Many people today yearn for warm, positive, meaningful relatedness to others, but seem unable to experience it. One can not avoid being impressed by the magnitude of this condition. One of the deepest problems of people is loneliness, isolation, and the difficulty of self-esteem in our society. There are two kinds of aloneness. Solitude can be creative, joyous, full aloneness. However, loneliness is painful, dead, empty aloneness. Loneliness is being acutely aware of one's isolation and alienation from others. As David Riesman pointed out (*The Lonely Crowd*), when a person is not vitally in touch with himself or herself or others, loneliness can occur even in the midst of a crowd.

Loneliness – the sound of the word conveys some of the heartache associated with it. Try saying the word aloud several times in a sorrowful voice; loneliness... loneliness... loneliness... It represents much pain for many people.

Several reasons have been given for the increased ache of loneliness in modern times... Materialism (finding one's solace in things rather than in people), the mobility of people, uprootedness of families, and the bureaucratic structure organizations are just a few. As we have lectured all of our life, a major cause of this interpersonal gap and one that can be rectified is inadequate skills and methods of interpersonal communication.

Unfortunately, the most intense loneliness today is often found in the family where communication is breaking down or it is a sham. Reading the newspapers these past weeks, one has to cry... Marriage, the most complex of all human relationships, cannot flourish without effective communication. Couples hoping to establish an enriching marriage often lack the needed relationship skills, and they end up living parallel lives in a marriage without intimacy. It is as if they are quoting the words of the poet T.S. Eliot for describing what may be a typical family:

“Two people who know they don’t understand each other
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who never will understand them.”

The first point is that as human beings, we have to work hard to avoid losing so much love...

Proximity without intimacy is inevitably destructive. When communication is blocked, love’s energy turns to resentment and hostility. The result is frequent bickering and withering sarcasm, repetitious criticism, or an icy retreat into silence and sexual unresponsiveness.

The second point is that as human beings, we have to show our best to prevent living in a kind of psychological slum.

As many parents can attest, it is not an easy thing to raise children today.

As Virginia Satir has instructed in her book *People Making*, parents teach in the toughest school in the world- The School for Making People. You are the board of education: the principal, the classroom teacher, and the janitor... You are expected to be an expert on all subjects pertaining to life and living... There are few schools to train you for a job, and there is no general agreement on the curriculum. You have to make it up yourself. Your schools have no holidays, no vacations, no automatic promotions or pay increases. You are on duty or at least on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for at least 20-25 years. You have to content with an administration that has two leaders or bosses, whichever the case may be, and you know the traps two bosses can get into with each other. Within this context, you can carry on your people making venture. Indeed, this is the hardest, most complicated, ridden, sweat, blood and tears producing job in the world.

The third point is that healthy communication is vitally important in raising a family. For couples who have real competence in communication skills, parenthood can be one of the most rewarding and joyous experiences of their lifetimes. When parents have no mastered skills for accurate, congruent communication, the resulting anguish, alienation and loneliness for parents and children alike can be devastating.

Communication is the lifeblood of every relationship. When open, clear, sensitive and respectful communication takes place, the relationship is nurtured. When communication is guarded, political, hostile or ineffective, the relationship falters. When communication skills are lacking, there is too much love lost.

Eighty percent of people who fail at work do so because they do not relate well to other people. One's productivity as leader, manager, supervisor, nurse, secretary, operator, attorney, physician, clerk, minister or accountant is greatly enhanced by the ability to communicate well (pay attention, reflect on what you are listening, talk with logical consequence and with feelings, be assertive, use recognition, reduce conflict, and foster collaboration and problem-solving).

- Communication skills are the key to success at work and life.

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