

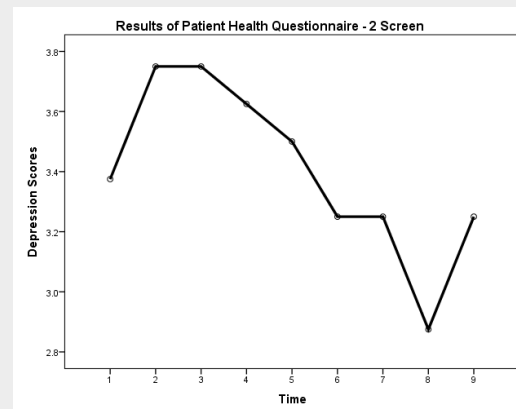
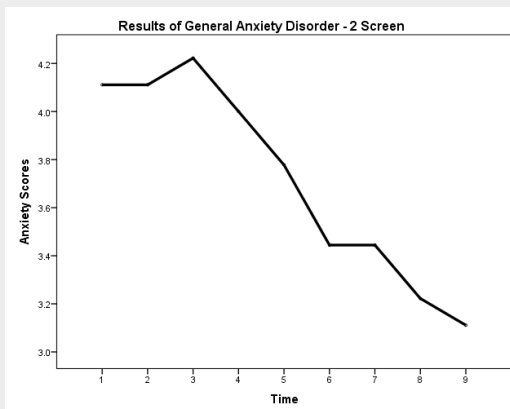
March 2022 Newsletter: Social Isolation Amongst Youth



Social isolation is defined as a lack of social contacts and social connection. Pre-Covid, we had many opportunities to build social connections through school, workplaces, religious institutions, volunteering, spending time with family, etc. While many working adults and companies are embracing the flexibility provided by work-from-home culture, school-aged children are experiencing unseen effects of the online learning culture.

Youth and adolescence is a critical time for children to build connections, friendships, and social skills. They often depend on their friendships to navigate their feelings and maintain a sense of self-worth. In a world of technology, while youth have Instagram, FaceTime, and TikTok, to stay in touch with their friends, they are missing building and maintaining deeper in person relationships, an important relational skill for navigating the world. [Several studies](#) have found that these circumstances have led to increased mental health challenges in school-aged children.

During 2020 and 2021, Children’s Research Triangle (CRT) regularly screened children for anxiety and depression. The Patient Health Questionnaire – 2 (PHQ-2) was used for depression screening and the General Anxiety Disorder – 2 (GAD-2) was used for anxiety screening. Upon analyzing the collected data, we found that anxiety and depression scores were at a peak towards the beginning of lockdown. Over time, as children were able to reconnect with friends and peers in-person, the anxiety and depression scores improved.



What does this mean for parents, teachers, and adults who interact with youth?

For as long as we have known, school has been a place for children to make friends, grow into their unique personalities, share stories and experiences, learn about other cultures, develop first crushes, and confide in their peers. Although a necessary preventative measure, school closures left many children feeling isolated and losing social connections. Parents, teachers, counselors, and other adults can help youth minimize the negative effects of social isolation.

Look for signs of “languishing”

When talking about mental health, we often tend to look at the two ends of the spectrum: Depression and Flourishing. But what about the youth who are neither depressed nor flourishing? These youth do not necessarily show signs of mental illness, but are generally unmotivated, feeling dull, and aimless. Professionals are calling this languishing.

[Researchers](#) have found that people who are languishing right now are more likely to experience depression and anxiety disorders later on in their life. In fact, a [study in Italy](#) found that people who were languishing in 2020 were three times more likely than their peers to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Can you think of someone in your life who might be languishing?

Yes

No



Be a role model for maintaining social connections

Youth often learn social behaviors from the adults in their life. When they see adults connecting with their friends, family, and coworkers, they are more likely to imitate that behavior. Find safe ways to reconnect with others and encourage the youth to do the same, whether it is going out for ice cream or simply taking a walk in a park.

Identify individual needs and empower youth

Each youth you encounter may have their unique experience with social isolation and social connections. Be respectful and learn about their unique needs by understanding how they interact with friends, peers, family, and other community members. Empower youth to make their own decisions and establish strategies to reconnect with some of these groups.



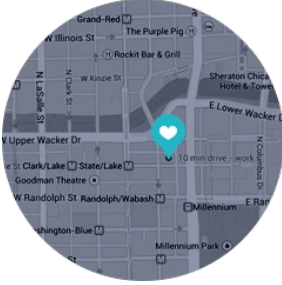
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