

# We Don't Survive In Isolation

By Luke De Sadeleer



Our society tends to focus on couples and can sometimes neglect the needs of the single person. I want to reinforce the fact that *human beings need to be involved in close relationships with others*, although at times it may certainly feel that there's no light at the end of the tunnel. But the many rewards of being in a healthy relationship justify the efforts we may need to make in order to get us to a better starting point on the road to happier relationships.

I will admit that I did not always have this opinion. During my early years as a practicing psychotherapist, when I used to conduct singles' workshops, I actually promoted independence. One of the statements I made back then went: "Anyone who has not developed sufficient strength to live alone, under-contributes to any relationship." My interpretation was that we had to learn to be happy alone, so that we would not be so desperate for companionship.

Fortunately, it did not take me long to realize that the requirement for living a fulfilling single life is more about developing our capacity for self-love, self-confidence and self-worth. The truth is that if you want love in your life, you have to be able to give it to yourself first. This inner strength will contribute to your ability to care for others as well as yourself, and will enable you to develop and nurture caring relationships.

We should not isolate ourselves but seek out caring relationships. It is a fact that people who have richer relationships enjoy better health.

Much research has been done on attachment and loss. These studies demonstrate that dependence on others is not a sign of immaturity or dysfunction – it is a natural part of the human condition in crisis times. And how wonderful it is, when you need someone to support you – they are by your side.

The key to emotional and physical health is *interdependence*. We start our lives as infants, totally dependent on others. As we mature, we become independent, developing our capacity for self-love and self-reliance. Eventually we discover that we all depend mutually on each other for our well-being – and when we can contribute to a relationship from a place of love and confidence in ourselves we become interdependent.

Unfortunately, there are still too many people in our North American culture who see independence as the solution to their social problems. Statements such as: “I don’t need anybody; I do just fine on my own” obstruct our view of reality.

Research shows that this lifestyle may be the cause of a shorter lifespan. As Dean Ornish points out in his book *Love and Survival*: “Dozens of studies demonstrate that solitary people have a vastly increased rate of premature death from all causes – they are three to five times likelier to die early than people with ties to a caring spouse, family or community.”

I strongly suggest that as you acquire the ability to love yourself and care for others, you make an effort not to isolate yourself. Instead, seek out other caring people. Become involved in your community. Get to know your neighbors. Join a social club or any organization that brings people together.

Perhaps now you can understand why I believe that we need relationships. Being emotionally connected to other caring people not only extends your life span and contributes to your well-being; it brings joy to your life.

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