

# Being Needed: Mattering as an Antidote to Loneliness

Project Access Resource Centers

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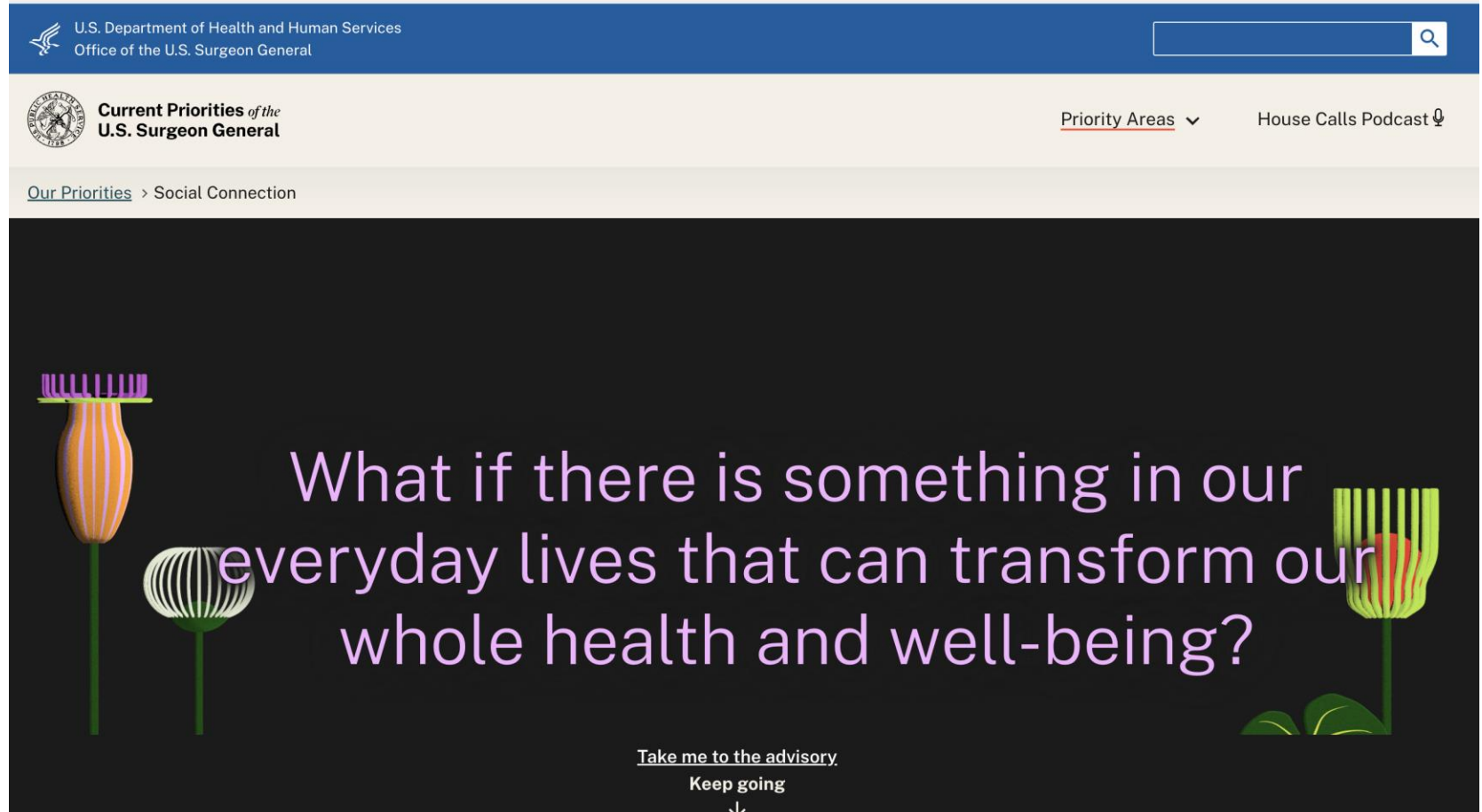


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# US Surgeon General Priorities Released 5/1/2023



<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html>



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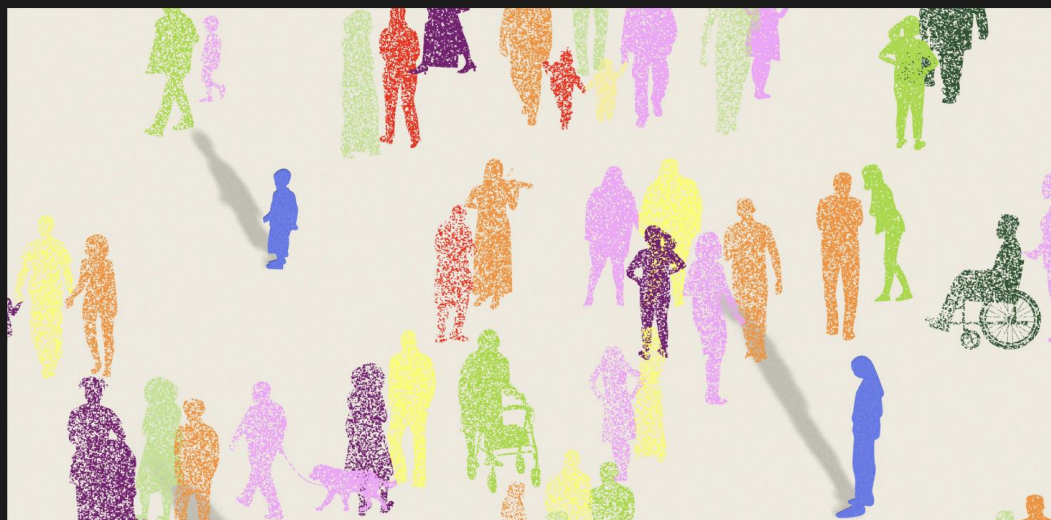
# US Surgeon General Priorities Released 5/1/2023

## Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the  
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



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“The worst thing that could happen to anyone is to never be used by anyone for anything. Thank you for using me, even though I didn’t want to be used by anybody.”

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *Sirens of Titan*



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# How experiences shaped my thinking

- People make sense of the world socially
- Social support is important in this process
  - Particularly non-instrumental support
- Mutual sense-making creates social bonds
  - “You had to be there”
- Social support research
  - Support received/available



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Are social isolation and  
loneliness the same thing?



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# Clarifying Terms- Social Isolation

- **Social Isolation** represents *absence of social connections*
  - Objectively measured by social contacts
  - Social network size
  - Living alone
  - Marital status
- External Social Isolation (Zavaeleta et al., 2017)
  - Frequency of social contact
  - Social network support
  - Presence of discussion partner
  - Reciprocity & Volunteering



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# Clarifying Terms- Loneliness

- **Loneliness** represents the *inadequacy of social connections*
  - Early conceptualization distinguished social vs. emotional loneliness
    - Social loneliness- absence of acceptable social network
    - Emotional loneliness- absence of an attachment figure or a “discussion partner”
  - Most often measured as discrepancy between desired and actual social relations
- Commonly measured by:
- UCLA Loneliness Scale
  - “how often do you feel that you lack companionship?”
- De Jong Gierveld Loneliness
  - “I experience a general sense of emptiness”
  - “There are many people I can trust completely”



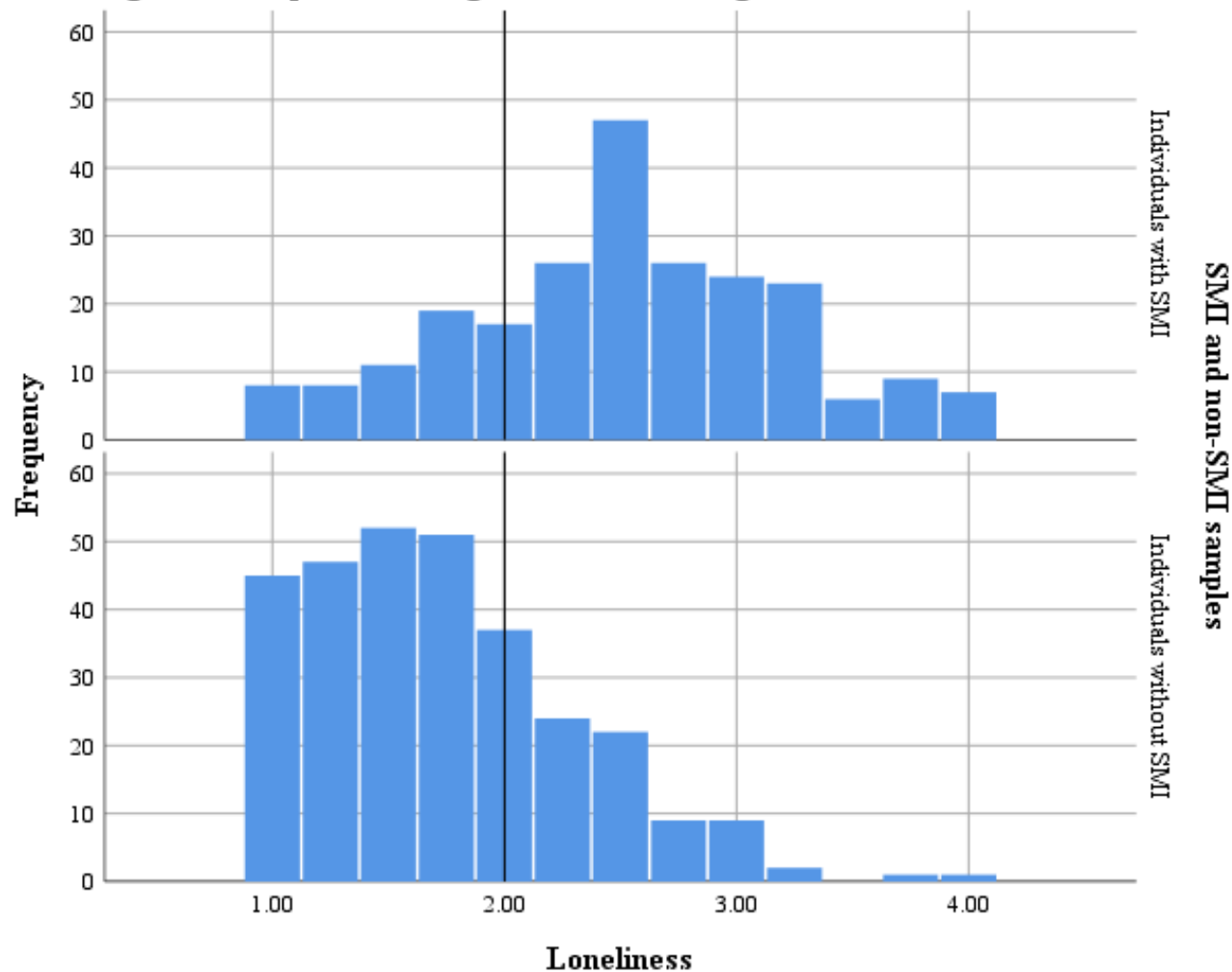
# Social Isolation & Loneliness among Adults with serious mental illness

- Greatest unmet needs among people with SMI (Fortuna et al., 2019)
- Social Isolation Indicators
  - Live alone more frequently (49% vs 17%)
  - More likely to be single/ never married (65% vs 31%)
  - Know fewer neighbors
- Social networks
  - 2.5 times smaller
  - More frequently other MH system users
  - Fewer friends (Koenders et al., 2017)
  - Significant "churn" of members (Perry, 2014)
- Loneliness
  - Higher rates of loneliness (up to 80%; Eglit et al., 2018)



# Scope of the Issue- Loneliness

Figure 1. Comparison of High Loneliness among Adults with and without SMI



Note: Reference line is Median (1.75) + 1 IQR = 2.00

# Importance of Social Connections

- Basic human need (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010)
- Eye gaze, touch basic sensory pleasure (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2008)
- Important factor in happiness (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2009)
- Build mutual trust & shared purpose (Spivey, 2020)
- Collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Baker 2001)



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Are isolation and loneliness  
just emotional experiences?

# Social Isolation: A Predictor of Mortality Comparable to Traditional Clinical Risk Factors

Matthew Pantell, MD, MS, David Rehkopf, ScD, MPH, Douglas Jutte, MD, MPH, S. Leonard Syme, PhD, John Balmes, MD, and Nancy Adler, PhD  
*American Journal of Public Health*, 2013; 103(11): 2056-2062

- Risk Comparable to:
  - smoking
  - hypertension



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# Social Isolation- Health Impacts

- Poor health behaviors (Eng et al., 2002; Hanson, 1994; Lochter, 2005)
  - Heavy drinking
  - Sedentary behavior
  - Poor nutrition
- Increased mortality risk (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010)
- HPA axis activation & cardiovascular disease (Liu et al., 2017)
- Oxidative stress, inflammation (Wolkowitz, et al., 2018).
- Cognitive decline, increased dementia risk (Beland et al., 2005; Fratiglioni et al., 2004)



# Loneliness- Health Impacts

- Cognitive decline (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010)
- Depressive symptoms (Solmi et al, 2020)
- Cardiovascular disease (Courtin & Knapp, 2017)
- Stroke & Hypertension (Cacioppo et al., 2014)
- Self-harm (Dell et al., 2020; Solmi et al., 2020)
- Increased hospitalizations (Fortuna et al., 2021)
- Poorer disease self-management (Fortuna et al., 2021)

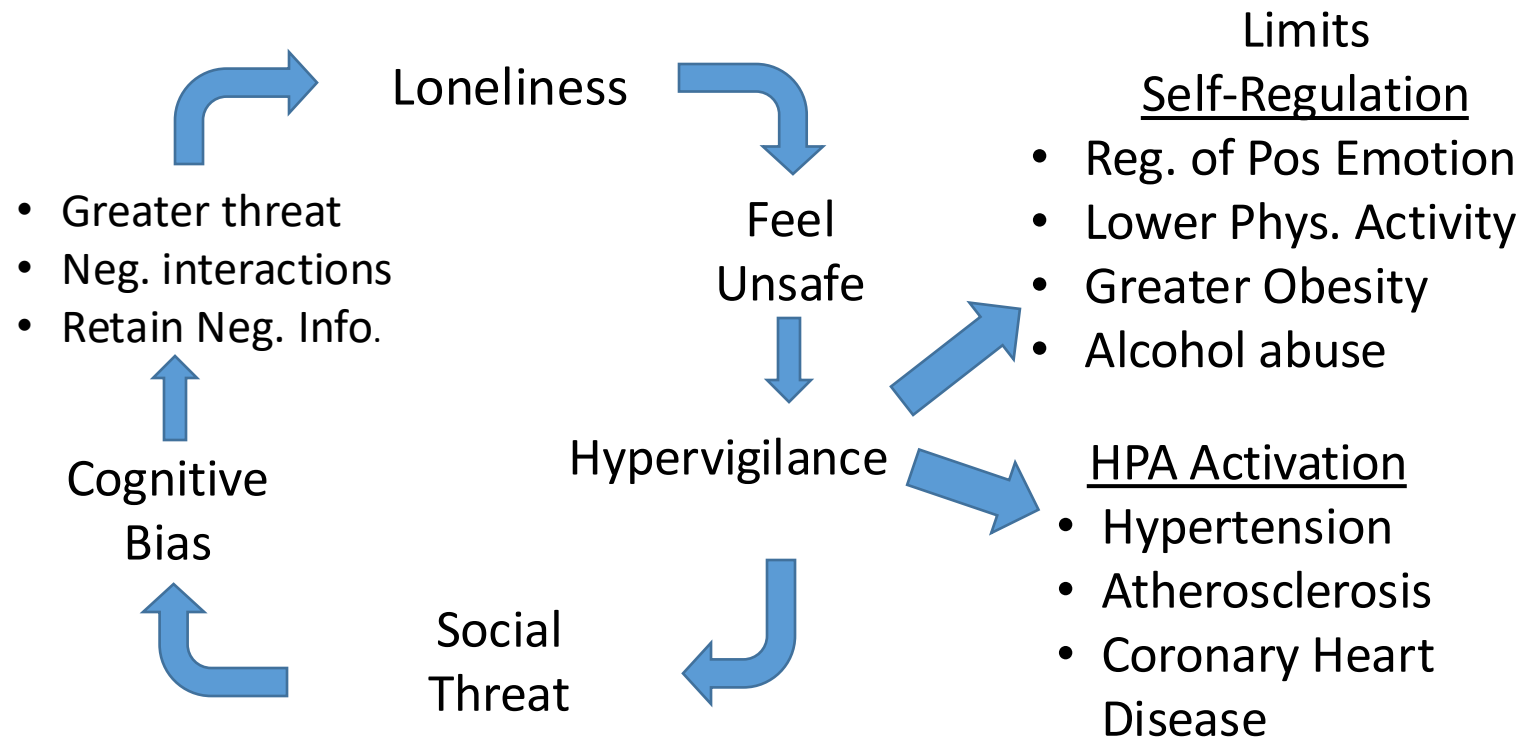


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# Potential Mechanisms

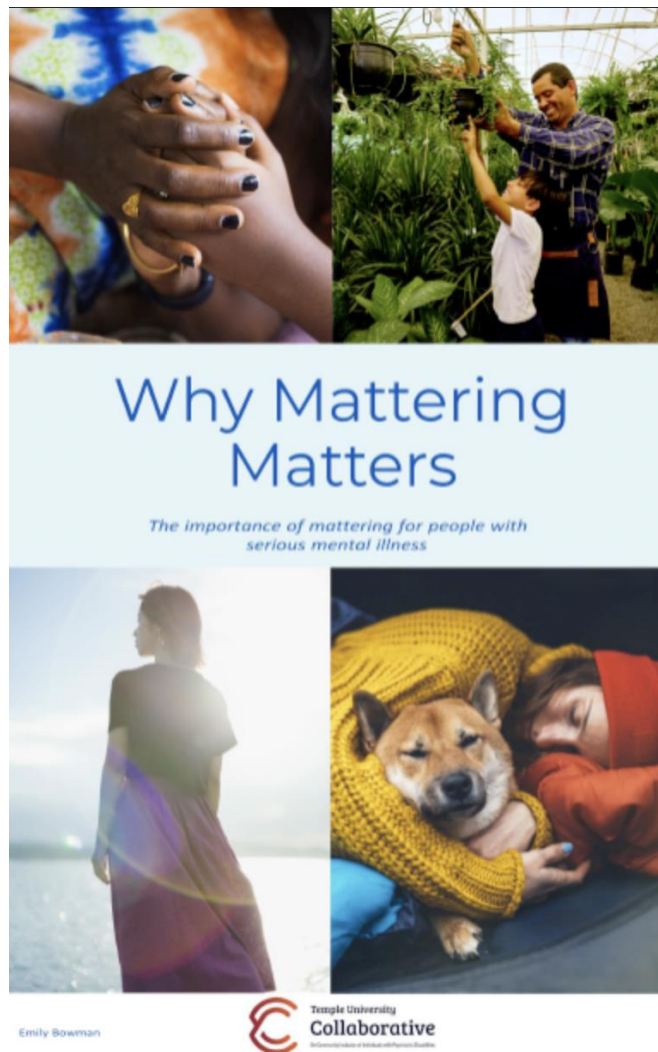


Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010) Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanism. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 40, 218-277.



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# Mattering as an Antidote to Loneliness

<http://www.tucollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/Mattering-Final-Revised.pdf>



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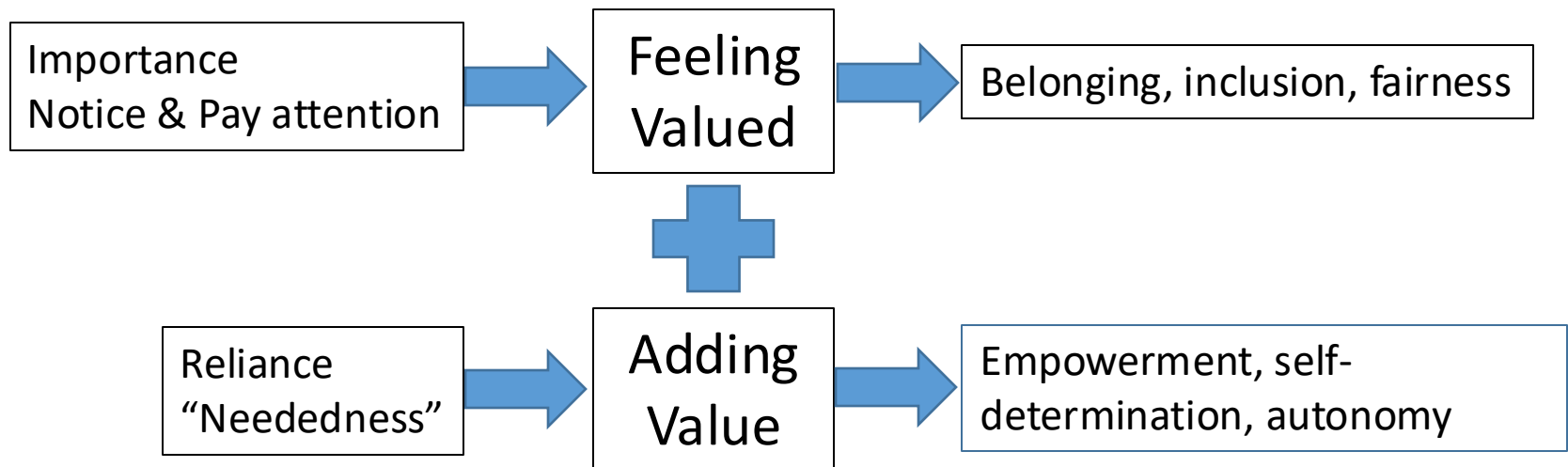
# Mattering

- Element of self-concept (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981)
- Extension of self-esteem
  - Central Components
    1. Sense that others depend on us
    2. Feeling that others regard us as important
    3. Belief others are actively paying attention to us
  - Later added:
    4. Belief we would be missed if no longer around
- Elliot et al. (2004) summarized as:
  1. Awareness
  2. Importance
  3. Reliance



# Mattering- Feeling Valued & Adding Value

- Asserted to be fundamental human need (Prilleltensky, 2020)



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# Why does mattering matter?

- Robust predictor of loneliness (Flett et al., 2016; McComb et al., 2020)
- Provides motivation for engaging in relationships (Elliot, 2009)
- Associated with recovery orientation among people with SMI (Pernice et al., 2017)
- Associated with meaning in life (Costin & Vignoles, 2020)



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# Positive Aspects of Mattering (Flett, 2022)

- Powerful influence on motivation and action
  - People wish to matter (Pearlin & LeBlanc, 2001)
- Source of resilience and adaptability
  - Resistance to mistreatment from others (Flett, 2018)
- Mattering can be modified and cultivated
  - Through adding value, mattering can be increased (Davis et al., 2019; Milner et al., 2016; Prilleltensky, 2020)
- Concept is broadly relevant
  - Can be seen in its absence
- Remains pertinent over the lifespan
  - Initially focused on youth (NRC, 2002), also relevant in adults (Dixon, 2007)
- Mattering is particularly relevant in times of difficulty
  - Linked to more positive self-appraisals (Besser et al., 2020)
  - Feelings of stability in transitions (Flett & Zangeneh, 2020)



“The person who feels like he or she matters is someone who feels important, visible, and heard, while the person who feels like he or she does not matter to others feels unimportant, invisible and unheard” (Flett, 2022, p. 4).



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# Mattering- Health Impacts

- Youth
  - Lower risk of suicidal ideation (Elliott et al., 2005)
  - Reduced anxiety & depression (Dixon et al., 2009)
  - Reduced odds of family violence (Elliott et al., 2011)
  - Reduced anti-social & self-destructive behavior (Marshall, 2004; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981)
- College Students
  - Reduced depression (Dixon et al., 2008; Flett et al., 2012)
  - Greater self-regulation (Flett & Nepon, 2020)
- Working age Adults
  - Reduced odds of suicidal ideation (Milner et al., 2016)
- Older Adults
  - Overall wellness (Myers & Degges-White, 2007)



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# Building Sense of Mattering- Being Valued

**Table 3.2** Ways to convey to people that they matter

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Inquiring often about what someone wants or thinks  
Investing time and energy into someone's wellbeing  
Expressing a belief in someone and their capabilities  
Letting someone know they are needed and relied upon  
Going out of one's way to enhance someone's wellbeing  
Wanting to know about someone's hopes, fears, interests, and values  
Reacting with compassion when compassion is clearly needed  
Acknowledging efforts, accomplishments, and achievements  
Expressing gratitude as a form of appreciation  
Sharing life events and past personal events, both positive and negative

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Flett, G. L. (2018). The psychology of mattering : Understanding the human need to be significant. London, UK: Academic Press



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# Building Sense of Mattering- Adding Value

Ask people for their assistance

Give people responsibility

Encourage use of talents & skills

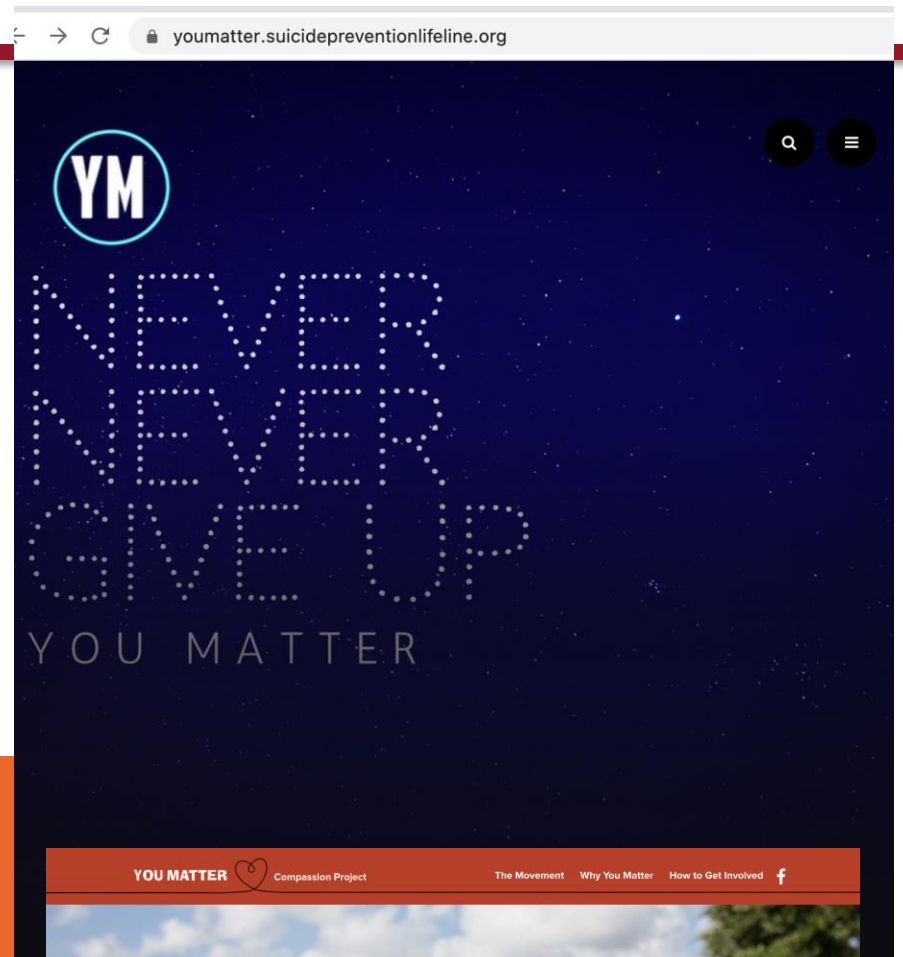
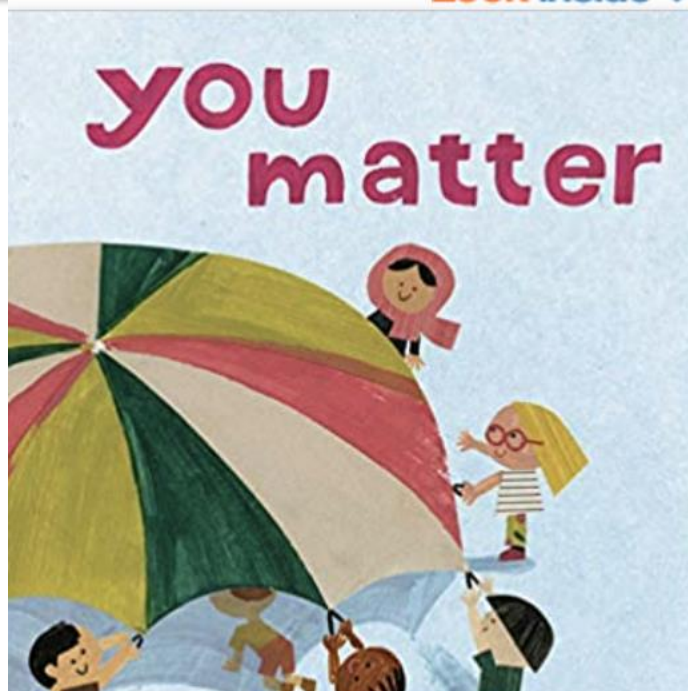
Recognize people for their contributions

Ask for peoples' opinion



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**EVERY  
CHILD  
MATTERS**



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# Discussion



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# Suggested Readings

- Elliott, G. C., Kao, S., & Grant, A. (2004). Mattering: Empirical validation of a social–psychological concept. *Self and Identity*, 3, 339–354.
- Flett, G. L. (2018). *The psychology of mattering : Understanding the human need to be significant*. Academic Press.
- Flett, G. L. (2022). An introduction, review, and conceptual analysis of mattering as an essential construct and an essential way of life. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 40(1), 3-36. 2022;doi:10.1177/07342829211057640
- Prilleltensky I. (2020). Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65(1-2), 16-34. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12368



Thank You!!

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