

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness and mental health

Renewing our Sense of Connection as We Age

When we reflect on all the ways our minds and bodies have changed over the years, all the friends we've lost, the plans that feel impossible now, and other changes that happen as we age, there can be a profound sense of disconnect. Even when we have people who care about us deeply, we can still fall into thought patterns that leave us with a feeling of loneliness.

Embracing tools grounded in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help us break free from these cycles of rumination and feel more connected and fulfilled as we navigate this stage of life.



For example, if you do catch yourself experiencing worried or anxious thoughts, practicing mindfulness can help you slow down and escape the spiral. Mindfulness is a technique for staying present in the moment and simply observing what is happening without passing judgment. As we observe our thoughts, we begin to see them for what they are – temporary, fleeting, and always coming and going on their own. Then, we can ask ourselves important questions like: *"What truly matters to me right now? How can my values guide me to refocus my time and energy in a meaningful way?"*

This practice becomes particularly valuable as we age. Instead of bouncing from one worried thought to another, we can redirect our attention to focus on what we value most. Maybe that is having deep connections with loved ones, performing acts of kindness, or savoring moments of beauty. Mindfulness can help you to get unstuck and guide your focus back to living according to your values rather than your fears.

Another valuable CBT tool that can be especially helpful for addressing the challenge of loneliness and decreased social connections we may feel as we age is called Behavioral Activation. This involves taking very small, focused steps that generate positive momentum and get us moving in the right direction. Putting this into practice looks a little different for everyone. Maybe you start by calling a friend you haven't spoken to in a while or by having lunch with a family member. You may consider finding others who share your interests by volunteering or joining a club. The goal isn't to recreate the social life you had in the past, but to build connections that feel meaningful now.

Loneliness doesn't need to be an inevitable part of aging. Using mindfulness and Behavioral Activation together, we can escape anxious rumination that leaves us feeling lonely and stuck, identify what matters most, and then take small but meaningful actions that will eventually become new and lasting connections.

Get Started Today

Often the biggest changes begin with the smallest shifts. Choose one small step toward greater presence or connection and start there. You can take a small step today to gain awareness of your overall mental health and wellbeing needs by taking a quick mental health assessment. Do this by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and enter access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

