



ECHO IDAHO: **Counseling Techniques for SUDs**

Anxiety, Loneliness & Alcohol

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Learning Objectives

Anxiety

Loneliness

Interconnection of anxiety, loneliness & alcohol use

Risks

Anxiety

- Anxiety is characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes.
- Future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a real or perceived threat. (APA)
- Symptoms:
 - Feeling nervous, restless or tense
 - Sense of impending danger, panic
 - Increased heart rate
 - Rapid breathing
 - Difficulty focusing
 - Fatigue or weakness
 - Irritability
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Diarrhea or constipation



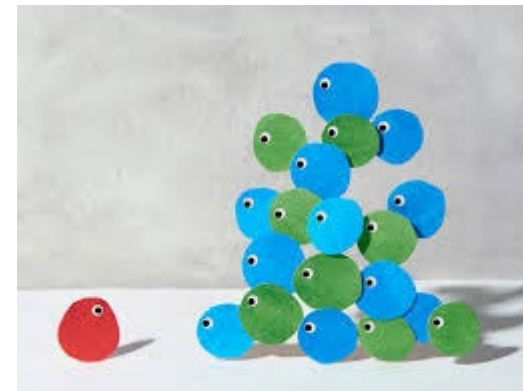
Anxiety



- Social Anxiety
 - Extreme fear of social situations
 - Fear of criticism, judgment or evaluation of others
- Panic Disorder
 - Frequent & unexpected panic attacks
 - Sudden fear, discomfort or sense of loss of control without identified trigger
- Agoraphobia
 - Fear of situations or places that cause panic, feelings of being trapped, helpless or embarrassed.
- Specific Phobia
 - Marked fear or anxiety of a specific object or situation
 - Flying, heights, animals, receiving injections, seeing blood, etc.

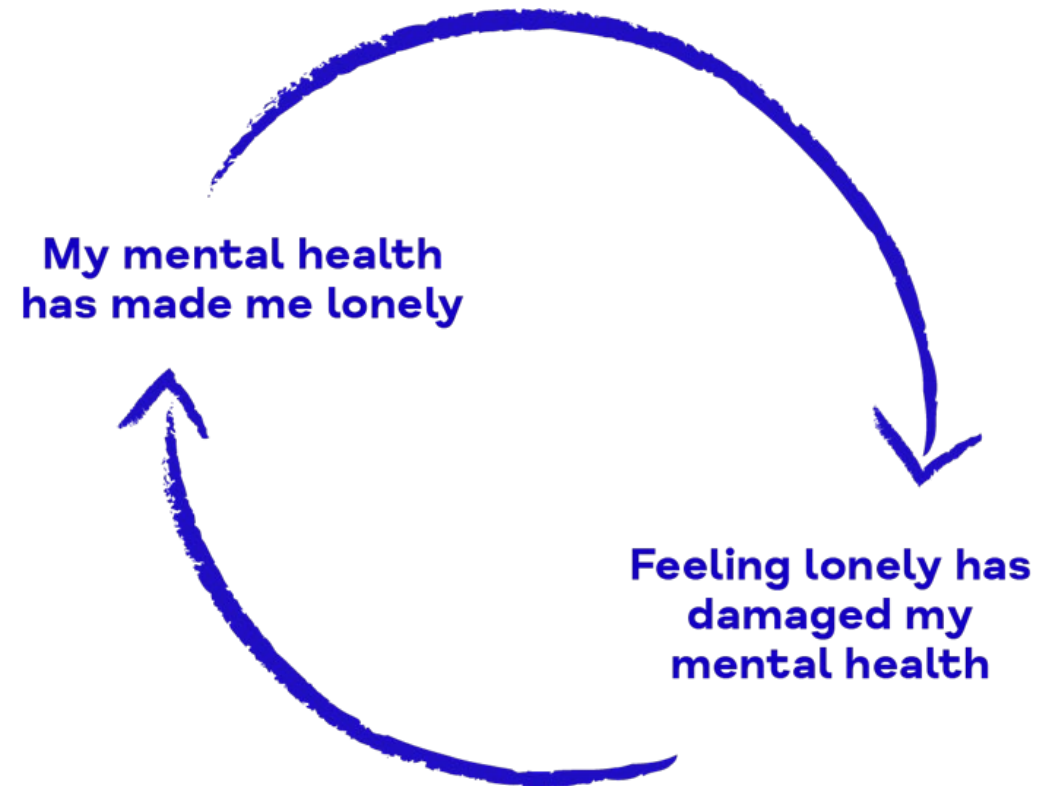
Loneliness

- A state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one's desire for social connection and the actual experience of it.
 - Existential Loneliness
 - A feeling of fundamental separation from others and the world.
 - Emotional Loneliness
 - Feeling a lack of relationships or attachments.
 - Social Loneliness
 - Lacking a feeling of belonging to a group beyond yourself.
- Loneliness vs. Isolation
 - Distressed feeling of being alone or separated (lonely)
 - The lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly. (isolation)
 - You can live alone and not feel lonely or isolated.
 - You can feel lonely while being with others.



Are Loneliness & Anxiety Connected?

- Loneliness is a predictor of depressive symptoms & anxiety
- Some anxiety may be experienced due to feelings of isolation, with loneliness contributing to anxiety due to a higher risk of negative thought patterns, negative views of self – increasing symptoms of anxiety.
- Additionally, anxiety can lead to isolation with more risk of feeling lonely, perpetuating the cycle.
- Increase of isolation, loneliness & anxiety due to COVID and social restrictions.
 - A jump from 20.7% to 58.1%



Alcohol Use

Why do people drink?

- Induce euphoria/feel good
- Reduce anxiety & stress
- Due to social settings
 - Increase ability to engage with others
- Lowers inhibitions
 - Feel more confident
 - To feel calm & relaxed



- Consider the initial appeal of alcohol use with the negative symptoms of anxiety and loneliness.
- Self-medicating mental health symptoms with alcohol increases risk of AUD and compounds negative symptoms.

Alcohol Use & Anxiety

- Alcohol consumption releases flood of dopamine into the pleasure center of the brain (Yay! Happy feelings)
- Heavy drinking leads to an increase in GABA (calm, relaxed neurotransmitter)
- Alcohol wears off, leading to an influx in anxiety
- Rebound effects can be worse than original baseline of anxiety



Risks of the triad

- Anxiety
 - Weakened immune system
 - Heart disease
 - Digestive disorders
- Loneliness
 - Increased risk of health issues
 - High blood pressure
 - Obesity
 - Heart disease
 - Cognitive decline
- Alcohol
 - High blood pressure & heart issues
 - Liver & Pancreas problems
 - Various Cancers
 - Weakened immune system
 - Cognitive decline



Take Aways



Self-Medicating

Alcohol is more likely to exacerbate symptoms of anxiety & loneliness due to the rebound effects.

We have a baseline of anxiety and/or loneliness, consume alcohol to feel better. We feel better for a short time, followed by negative symptoms often creating a more intense and negative experience of anxiety or loneliness.

Due to the risk of dependence (alcohol use is a progressive disease) the risk of AUD is very high

Mental health

Loneliness is a main risk factor for depression & anxiety

Mental health symptoms and disorders are often correlated with higher rates of SUD

Those struggling with anxiety & loneliness are seeking ways to alleviate their discomfort

We do what we can, with what we have in the moment. Not everyone is aware of the risks of engaging in a quick fix like alcohol, to sooth themselves

Treatment options

- Education
- Social Support
- Individual therapy & Skills training
- Group therapy
- Support groups
- Exercise, nutrition, meditation, sunshine & nature
- Medication for anxiety and AUD



References

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