Combat loneliness.
Cultivate belonging.

A Springtide™ Guide for Serving the Young People in Your Life
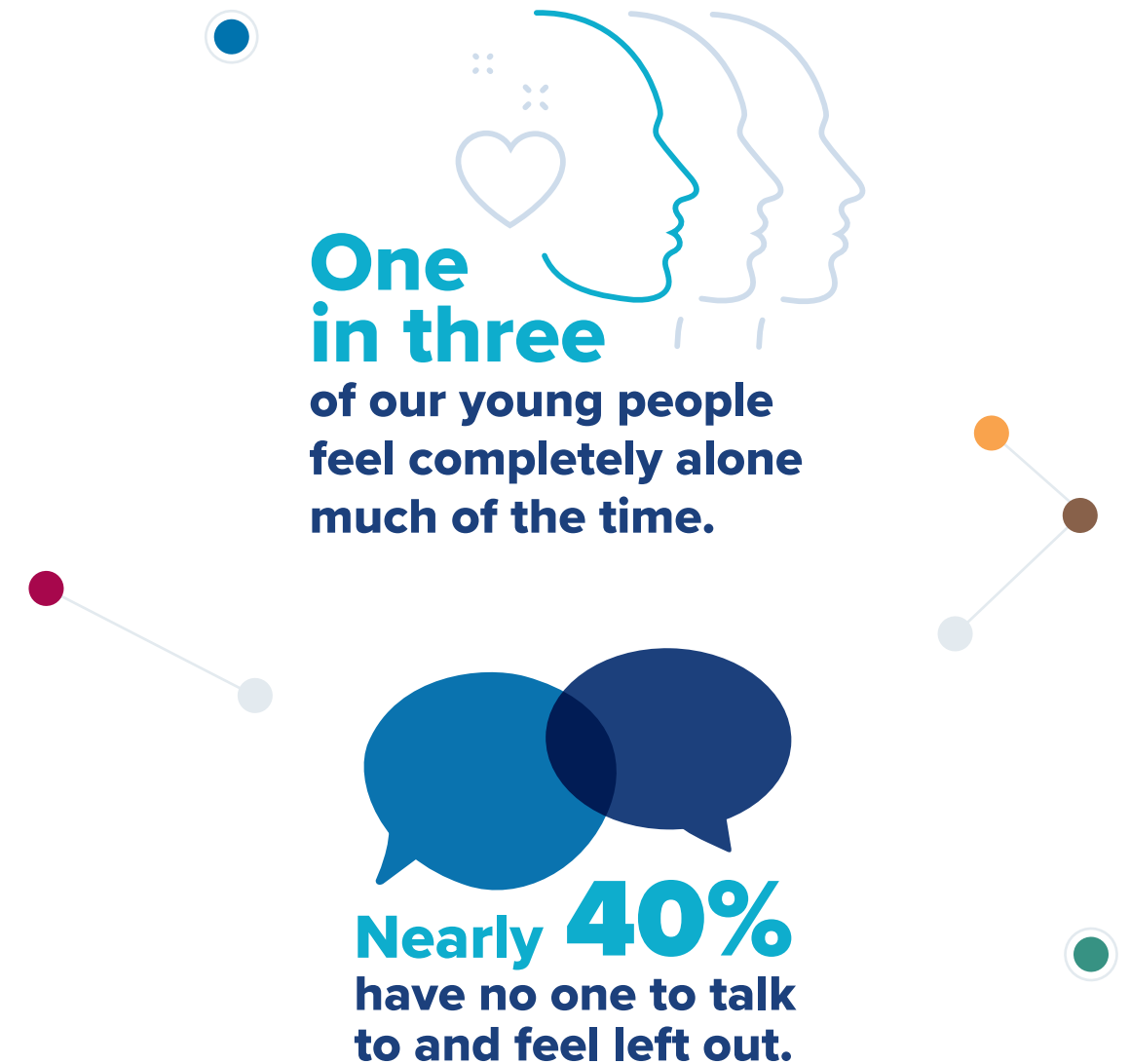
With data and key findings
from *Belonging: Reconnecting
America's Loneliest Generation*

Springtide™
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Young people today are experiencing epidemic levels of loneliness.

Our national survey, the findings of which are reported in full in *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation*, was executed in 2019 with a nationally representative sample of young people aged 13-25. We collected both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews focused on identifying the extent of young people's experience of loneliness, social isolation, and stress.

One in three of our young people feel completely alone much of the time.

Nearly **40%** have no one to talk to and feel left out.

Our data indicate that one in three of our young people feel completely alone much of the time. Nearly 40% have no one to talk to and feel left out, and 45% feel as if no-one understands them.

The statistics are devastating; the human consequences are heartbreaking.

Participating is not the same as belonging.

Young people get a sense of belonging not from simply participating in activities or events, but from the individual relationships with trusted adults within a community.

For many young people today, the institutions traditionally associated with building or cultivating a sense of community—like religious institutions—are no longer considered trustworthy.

In fact, our data show that participating in religious groups has virtually no protective effect against the experience of loneliness.
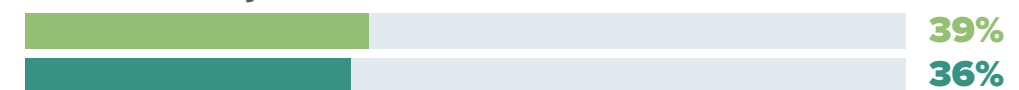
Young People's Experience of Loneliness

Percentages of 13-to-25-year-olds who AGREE (responding "sometimes" or "always") with each statement.

● **Total Sample**
● **Those Who Attend Religious Gatherings**

I have nobody to talk to.

39%
36%

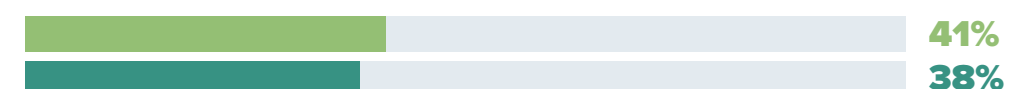**I feel completely alone.**

33%
30%

I feel as if no one understands me.

45%
43%

No one really knows me well.

36%
33%

It is difficult for me to make friends.

41%
38%
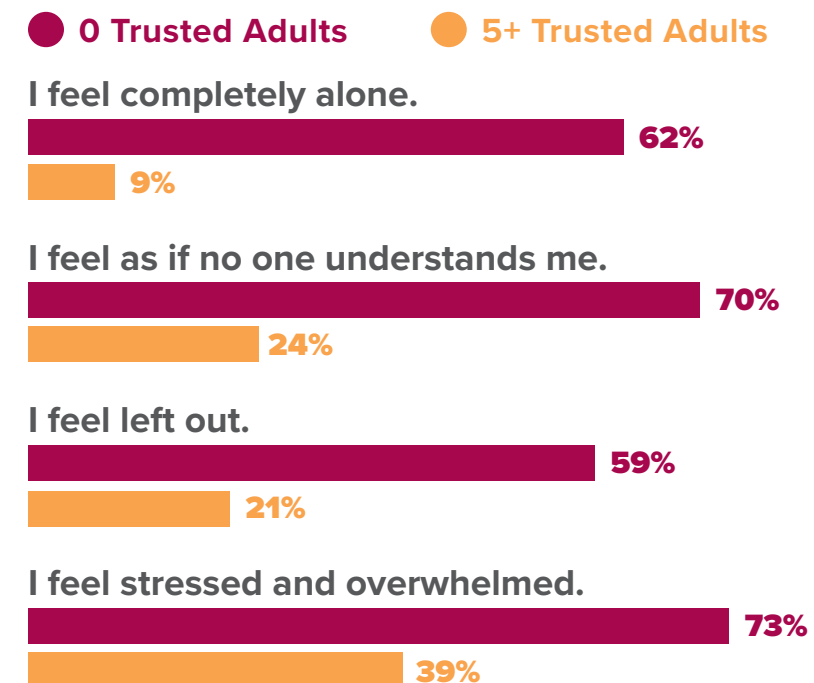
S **SPRINGTIDE™ NATIONAL RESEARCH RESULTS**

More important than merely showing up? Showing care.

As the number of trusted adults in a young person's life increases, their reported feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and stress decrease. And not just slightly: by a strikingly significant degree.

Percentages of 13-to-25-year-olds who agree with each statement.

In every interview for this report, we asked questions about where young people felt a sense of belonging. But every time we pushed young people to tell us where, they pushed back.

Over and over, they would tell us **who**—who created a sense of belonging for them. It turns out, the place or setting didn't matter nearly as much as the relationships these young people had with family, friends, and caring adults.

● **0 Trusted Adults**   ● **5+ Trusted Adults**

I feel completely alone.
- 62%
- 9%

I feel as if no one understands me.
- 70%
- 24%

I feel left out.
- 59%
- 21%

I feel stressed and overwhelmed.
- 73%
- 39%

Young People Need More Trusted Adult Relationships in Their Lives.

Connecting young people to even just one additional trusted adult can reduce their feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress. But the benefits of connecting young people to five or more trusted adults is a game-changing prospect and ought to be our goal.
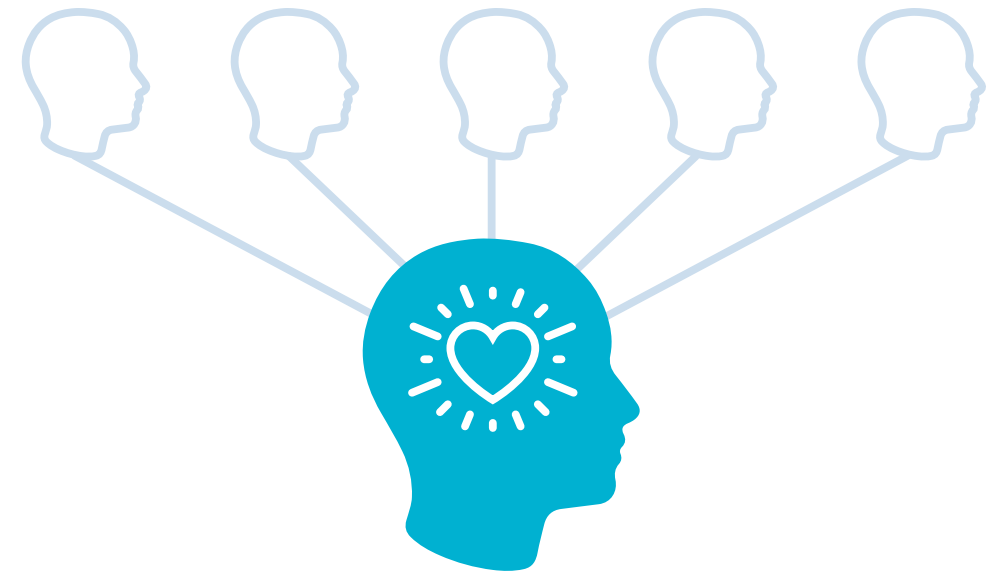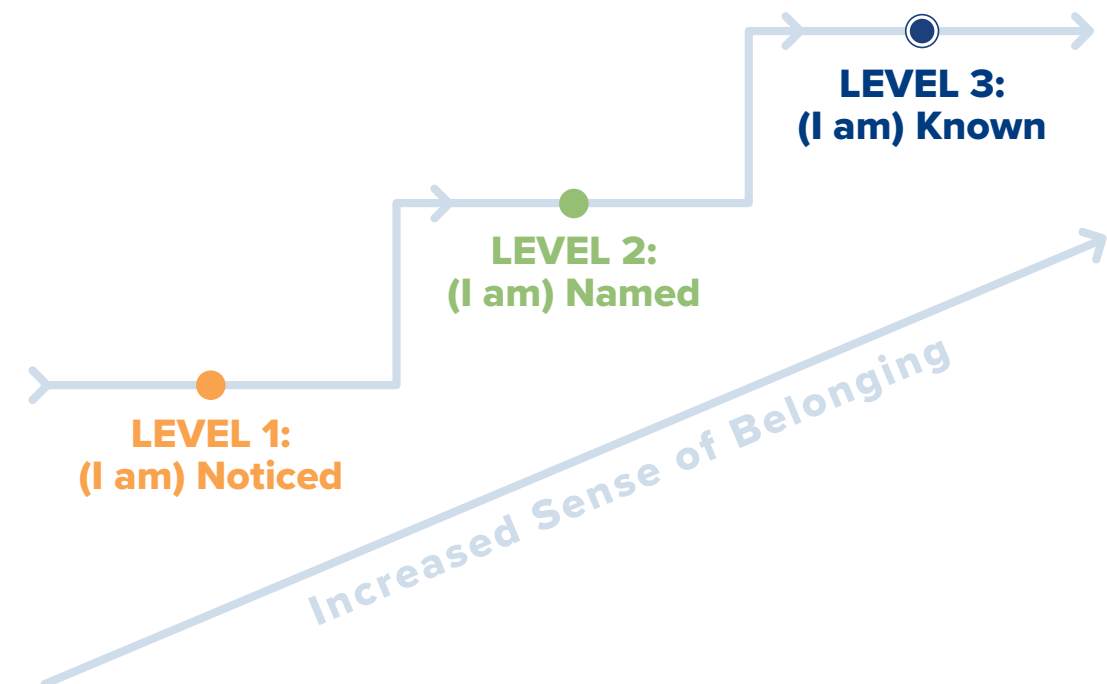
"Belonging relationships" are one antidote to their rampant loneliness and social isolation.

BUT HOW DO WE DO IT? ❯

The Belongingness Process

Young people's experiences of belongingness can be cultivated by trusted adults, and belongingness deepens through an identifiable process.

We call this the Belongingness Process.

LEVEL 3:
(I am) Known

LEVEL 2:
**(I am) Named**

LEVEL 1:
(I am) Noticed

Increased Sense of Belonging

When Springtide analyzed the interview data for our *Belonging* report, we observed a clear pattern in the stories of young people as they moved from joining a group to ultimately experiencing true belonging within that group.

Over and over again, three distinct experiences showed up in their narratives: *feeling noticed*, *feeling named*, and *feeling known*. These experiences build on one another to deepen the overall experience of belonging. This movement sometimes happens quickly and sometimes more slowly.

(I am) Noticed

The perception of "being noticed" by another—being seen or acknowledged, even in the most straightforward ways—is the initial step toward a sense of belonging.

It is here that young people describe the power of being invited into the relationship and having others become interested in them. The simple act of seeing generates an initial sense of belongingness for a young person, which creates a foundation for deeper relationships.
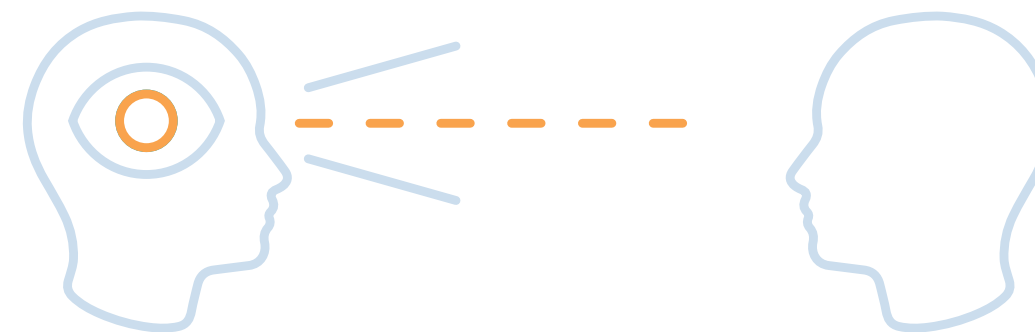
Give a young person the experience of being noticed.

A helpful reflection to more effectively establish this level of belongingness for a young person is to first pay attention to how you are paying attention. What are you hearing the other say? What are you observing in their body language? What do you notice about how they are feeling? In order to pay attention, you must be fully present.

Can you imagine how rare the experience is for a young person to have a trusted adult who is fully present to them, making them feel as if nothing matters more in this moment than paying attention to their life? This is the action needed at this level of belonging.

LEVEL 2:
(I am) Named

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks defines community as "that place where I am known by name and missed if I were gone." To be named by another is significant both in literal and metaphorical ways.

It is a way to communicate the felt experience of being known, which is a vulnerable and important experience that paves the way to an abiding sense of belongingness. It builds on and deepens the sense that one is noticed.

Commit to knowing the names of the young people in your community.

When you learn a young person's name, confirm that you are using their expressed pronouns and proper pronunciation. Memorize their name and use it three times in conversation soon after learning it, and again in every passing or gathering.

Deepen the felt experience of being named by becoming curious about the young person's life. Ask questions that result in them feeling like they are beginning to be known by you on a deeper level. These questions will help you to begin to know a young person's fears, anxieties, hopes, and joys.

LEVEL 3:
(I am) Known

While becoming known is a process, it deepens and reaches another level of belongingness when a person begins feeling truly safe in a relationship or community.

This depth of belongingness builds on the first two levels, being noticed and being named, but adds the all-important dimension of unreserved acceptance.
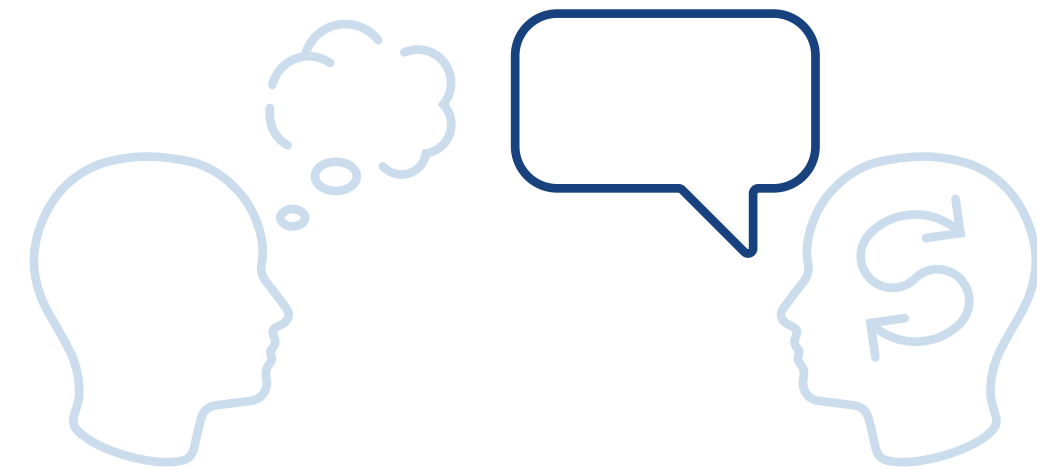
Practice non-judgment

If you feel inclined to pass judgment when listening to stories, opinions, or ideas of a young person, try to ask questions to learn more about where they're coming from, and enter their worldview.

Even if you disagree with their conclusions or decisions, make it clear that any disagreement is not a rejection of their personhood or their standing in your relationship or community.

There's even more to learn. Dive deeper into the data—and into our data-driven actions.

Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation offers data and insights to help you help young people feel more connected. The report highlights five main findings:

First Finding: *Many Young People Are Lonely*
Second Finding: *Many Young People Are Socially Isolated*
Third Finding: *Many Young People Are Stressed*
Fourth Finding: *Participation Is Not Belonging*
Fifth Finding: *The Impact of Trusted Adults*

After presenting these findings, it offers practical, data-driven tips for making changes.

Buy the book at *springtideresearch.org/product/belonging-reconnecting-americas-loneliest-generation*

Also available on Amazon: *amazon.com/Belonging-Reconnecting-Americas-Loneliest-Generation/dp/1641210893/*
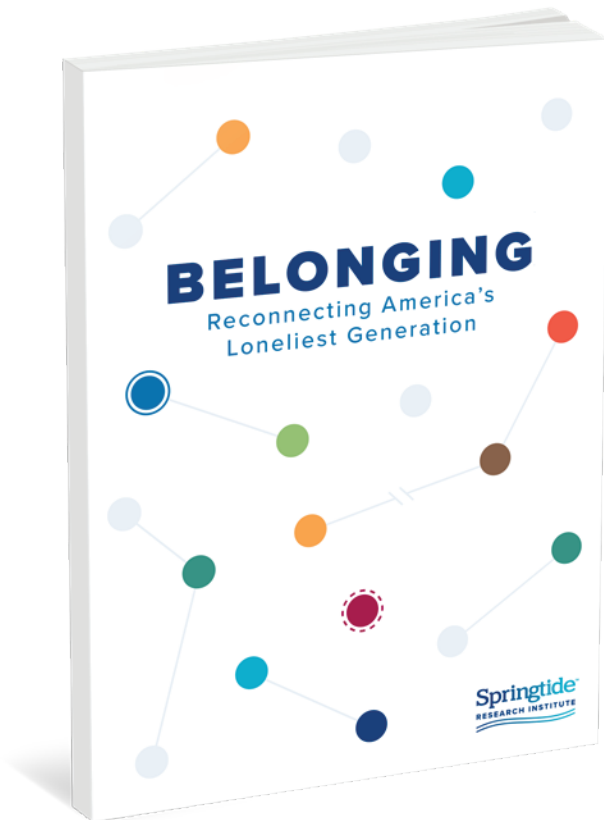
Ready to go deeper in the Belongingness Process?

Visit the Springtide website for a variety of resources to help you cultivate a sense of belonging with the young people in your own community and context. For blog posts, podcast conversations, or to sign up for our newsletter, go to *springtideresearch.org*.

Join the conversation, and connect with us on social media. Follow **@WeAreSpringtide** on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Share how you're developing belonging relationships with the young people in your circle of care. Send us a note at *stories@springtideresearch.org*.