

# SAFE SPACE RADIO



## LONELINESS AUDIO DISCUSSION GUIDE

[www.safespaceraudio.com](http://www.safespaceraudio.com)

## Using this Guide

The purpose of this discussion guide is to help facilitate discussion and reflection after listening to Safe Space Radio's *Loneliness* episode, part of Season One of our miniseries, *Can We Talk*. This guide is divided into sections corresponding to the five stories in the episode. We hope this discussion guide will prove useful to people directly impacted by the issues addressed in *Loneliness*, as well as friends, family members, caregivers, teachers, and healthcare providers for whom these conversations are part of daily life.

If you use Safe Space Radio in your home, classroom, group, or community, please let us know! We would love to hear from you at [info@safespaceaudio.com](mailto:info@safespaceaudio.com).

## About Safe Space Radio

**The mission of Safe Space Radio is to inspire courageous conversations, break down the barriers that divide us, and create compassionate communities.**

Founded in 2008, Safe Space Radio has broadcast more than 300 episodes and received numerous awards. The first season of our four-part miniseries, *Can We Talk?*, broadcast in May 2019 for Mental Health Awareness Month. Two long-form specials, "[Out-Takes](#)," on suicide prevention among LGBTQ teens, and "[Still Here](#)," on caregiving and dementia, both broadcast nationally in 2016. Our podcast is used in training programs for healthcare professionals, therapists, and teachers as they learn to address the needs of underserved populations.

## About Can We Talk?

*Can We Talk* is our miniseries for Mental Health Awareness in May. The first season broadcast in May 2019. Each episode explores a subject that is difficult to talk about through a combination of storytelling and expert guidance, offering listeners practical tools for navigating challenging conversations. This series is distributed in partnership with WBUR Boston.

The first season of *Can We Talk* includes four hour-long episodes:

- [Apologies](#)
- [Asking for Help](#)
- [Loneliness](#)
- [Talking to White Kids About Race & Racism](#)

## GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT LONELINESS

What do you think makes loneliness so hard to talk about?

Is it important to talk about loneliness? What happens when we don't talk about it?

What is loneliness? What does the word "loneliness" mean to you?

Describe a time you felt lonely. How would you describe the feeling of loneliness? Were you able to address your own loneliness? How?

What recommendations would you make to someone else struggling with loneliness? What would you say to a friend who tells you that they're feeling lonely?

Do you prefer alone time or would you rather be around other people most of the time? What are the benefits of your preference? What are the challenges?

How would you describe the difference between loneliness and being alone? Between loneliness and solitude?

Describe a scene, conversation, or story from this episode that you found particularly moving, vivid, or disturbing. What about that scene was compelling to you?

If you could ask anyone in this episode a single question, what would you ask them?

What did you take away from this episode that you wish everyone knew? What would change in our community if everyone knew it?

## ELLEN CORSON SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

Ellen says that she never hears people talking about the loneliness of being a divorced parent, even though 50% of marriages end in divorce. Why do you think this is?

### **Personal Reflection**

Have you ever felt like you failed or broke with society's expectations? What did it feel like? What were the challenges? How did the experience change your self-image?

Did anything in Ellen's story speak to or relate to something from your own life?

How do you feel when you're alone?

## JULIANNE HOLT-LUNSTAD SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

As Julianne says, we may not think of chronic loneliness as a traditional “public health risk.” Why do you think we’re focusing on the risks of loneliness right now? Did anything Julianne said surprise you?

How do you think population-scale loneliness affects our lives or relationships as individuals?

Julianne describes how the positive effects of being socially connected outweigh the negative effects of chronic loneliness. Why do you think this is? What do you think this says about humans? Does this seem true based on your own experience?

### **Personal Reflection**

Has your doctor ever talked to you about loneliness? What would you want them to say or ask?

What do you think are the biggest barriers to getting support or care for loneliness?

### **For Clinical Providers**

Do you address loneliness with your patients? Do you think it’s important to do so? How might you start a conversation about loneliness with a patient?

What do you think are the dangers of loneliness, physical and psychological? What do you wish everyone knew about loneliness?

## JARA AND KENLEY STURDIVANT-WILSON SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

Kenley tells Jara that he might not have named his loneliness if she hadn't asked him directly about it. Why do you think he hesitated to tell her? How do you think loneliness affects intimate relationships? What are some ways we can navigate or address loneliness in a partnership or close friendship?

What do you think are society's expectations for new parents? Do you think those expectations are a factor in Jara and Kenley's story?

### **Personal Reflection**

Have you ever moved to a new town or city where you didn't know anyone else? What were the challenges? What were the benefits? Did you experience loneliness?

Jara combats her loneliness in the hospital by praying to her ancestors. Do you have any strategies for combating loneliness in the moment you feel it?

Have you ever felt lonely even when your circumstances appeared "good" from the outside?

### **For Clinical Providers**

Postpartum mothers often experience loneliness but feel guilty about it, because they feel they should be enjoying every minute of their time with their baby. How can you bring it up with your patients in a way that doesn't make them feel embarrassed or ashamed?

## CARLA AND GLORIA PERISSINOTTO

### **Content Reflection**

Some people say that Western culture values young people more than old people, and Carla talks about how ageism is built into our culture. Do you believe this is true? In what ways do older folks experience discrimination? How do you see this in your own experiences?

Why do you think Gloria and Carla have never talked directly about Gloria's loneliness, even though Carla is an expert in aging?

### **Personal Reflection**

How do you experience loneliness in your family? Have you ever talked with your parents about loneliness? Or your children?

How do you think grief and loneliness are related?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of getting older?

### **For Clinical Providers**

Do you work with older folks or talk to patients about loneliness and aging? What is your approach to talking about loneliness with your older patients?

## BELLA MARINOS SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

What choices does Bella make to help her cope with loneliness? How did you feel about her choices? Why do you think they worked?

Why do you think teens are at an especially high risk for loneliness? Where did you see evidence for this reflected in Bella's story? Have you felt these pressures in your own life?

Bella describes her thoughts about social media. How "authentic" or "truthful" do you think people are online? How do you think social media plays a part in friendship? How do you think social media plays a part in loneliness?

Bella describes how her dad changed everything for her when he empathized with her feelings. Why do you think this was such an important moment for her? How does it seem to change her feelings about loneliness?

### **Personal Reflection**

Describe a time you made a choice to prioritize self-care when it wasn't easy to do so. What made it harder or easier? What were the results of your choice?

Do you say and share things using technology (social media, texting, etc.) that you would not share in person? How so?

What are the benefits and challenges of social media? If you were asked to "disconnect" for two weeks, how hard or easy would it be? How do you think it would change your interactions with other people?

Did anything in Bella's story speak to or relate to experiences from your own life? What do you think we can take away from Bella's story, regardless of age?

Do you have any pets? How do you think animals can influence loneliness?

Do you do any volunteer work? How do you think this impacts your feelings of connection vs. loneliness?

### **For Clinical Providers**

What do you think are some challenges of working with teens? How might you approach talking about loneliness with a younger client?

## ALYSON THOMPSON SEGMENT

### **Personal Reflection**

Alyson describes her own loneliness as “a lack of belonging” or feeling like she’s “not enough.” Can you identify with this feeling? Have you ever felt imposter syndrome?

Alyson describes “the gift of going first,” how taking steps to address her own loneliness helped others address theirs, too. Describe a time when your actions had a positive impact beyond what you could have hoped for.

Creating Mixed Feelings was the first time that Alyson was in a room of people who could understand her experience as a biracial person. What group do you wish you could form or join? What conversations would you like to have there?

## JOHN KENNEDY SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

Why didn’t John want to tell his caseworker about his suicidal thoughts?

Loneliness can feel so terrifying because we fear it can change us. How do you think loneliness changed John?

How would you describe the role of John’s work as a way to manage his loneliness?

### **Personal Reflection**

What is “depression?” What does the word depression mean to you? How is depression different from feeling sad? How do you think loneliness and depression are connected?

What are some misconceptions people might have about clinical depression? How do you think shame and depression are connected?

What would be your response to a friend or family member who revealed that they were feeling lonely or depressed? How do you think we can make it easier to talk about mental health?

### **For Clinical Providers**

How did you feel about the decision that John’s caseworker makes in this story? Why do you think she chooses not to call crisis? How might the outcome have been different if she had sent him to the ED?

## ANNIE MCCARTHY SEGMENT

### **Content Reflection**

Why do you think Annie kept her relationship with Helen a secret from her community? What changed for her after she told the truth about herself?

Annie gives advice for other people who are coming out, like “loneliness doesn’t have to be your enemy” and “find your people.” How do you think her advice could apply to loneliness in other situations?

### **Personal Reflection**

Public self-revelation, as in coming out, can mean many different things for different people. What are the benefits? What are the challenges? Does Annie’s experience speak to or relate to anything from your own life?

How would you describe the connection between loneliness and keeping a secret?