Session 1: Loneliness and Companionship

How to recognize the effects of social isolation and loneliness in our elders.

Best Practices:

Being Aware of How Social Isolation and Loneliness Impact Mental and Physical Well-Being

Mental Well Being	Physical Well Being
• Lack of interest in personal care • Feelings of anger toward others may cause elders to withdraw. • Diminished social circles and low-quality social relationships. • Lack of interest in previous hobbies or activities.	• Increased risk for Dementia • May hasten premature death. • Sleeping more throughout the day. Disturbed sleep patterns • Frailty related to an increased sedentary lifestyle.

Identifying Loneliness, Helplessness, and Boredom in the Nursing Home

Loneliness May Look Like	Helplessness May Look Like	Boredom May Look Like
Expressions of **sadness** resulting in: • Tearfulness • Repetitive actions like hand ringing • Voicing feelings of despair • Blinds closed • Preferring to remain in bed throughout the day • Expressions of physical pain or discomfort	Unintended **weight loss:** • Resulting from lack of interest in food or inability to feed oneself Unkempt personal appearance: • Resulting from a decline in personal care habits or resistance to bathing, toileting, dressing for the day	**Confusion**: • Searching for loved ones • Outward communications: calling out for loved ones • Wandering in search of loved ones • Rummaging through personal belongings looking for personal contacts like phone numbers or addresses

Links to Supporting Documents
- [CDC: Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions](#)
- [Roots of Loneliness - Signs of Loneliness: What to Watch For (and When to Worry)](#)
- [Higher Social Engagement and Frequent Contact May Reduce Risk for Dementia](#)

Discussion Questions:

- Share some examples from your experience of how certain environments, healthcare processes, and caregiver interaction may lead to loneliness for our elders.
- Share some examples of how your home/community has worked to combat loneliness and social isolation.
- Share some opportunities that you have observed in your home promoting social connectedness between:
    - Our elders and other elders
    - Our elders and their family & friends
    - Our elders and our staff