

When 'Together' Feels Lonely: The Friendship Institute Illuminates the Link Between Connection, Kindness, and WellBeing

Do you experience the holiday paradox?

CARY, NC, UNITED STATES, November 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In honor of World Kindness Day, exploring why so many feel disconnected in a season of togetherness and how friendship is the path to a greater level of wellbeing begins with friendship and belonging.

Today, World Kindness Day, reminds us that even the smallest act of care can change someone's day and, as science now shows, their health. Yet as the holiday season approaches, kindness often gives way to busyness, and connection can slip through the cracks.



Co-founders of Friendship Institute

According to Cigna's 2023 Loneliness Index, more than half of U.S. adults say they feel lonely at least weekly, with the sharpest rise coming in November and peaking in December. Psychologists call this the [holiday paradox](#): when the expectation of joy and the pressure to feel happy deepen emotional isolation instead.

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Being around people doesn't automatically create togetherness, intention does. When we slow down, reach out, and show up authentically, friendship becomes the bridge from isolation to belonging.”

*Donna Brighton, co-founder
and friendship coach*

While physical and mental wellness often take center stage, relational wellbeing, the quality of our friendships and connections, is what allows both body and mind to flourish. That truth is at the heart of The Friendship Institute's new holiday podcast series, *Friendship Matters: Friendship for Every Season*. Launching on November 17th, this series explores how authentic relationships

protect wellbeing and why kind, intentional connection may be the most meaningful gift we give, or receive, this year.

“The holidays magnify both joy and pain,” says Lisa T. Grimes, CEO and co-founder of The Friendship Institute. “We want people to know that loneliness isn’t a failure—it’s a signal. Connection is the remedy, and friendship is where wellbeing begins. When we reach out with genuine care, we’re not just being nice—we’re improving emotional and physical health. Friendship is kindness in action.”

The Hidden Cost of Holiday Disconnection

Research from UCLA and the University of Chicago reveals that loneliness activates the same brain regions as physical pain and increases stress hormones that weaken the immune system.

In contrast, friendship acts as a biological buffer. Studies led by Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad show that people with strong social relationships are 50% more likely to live longer and report greater happiness and resilience.

“We often talk about physical and mental health as separate pillars,” explains Dr. Russell Greenfield, co-founder and integrative medicine physician. “But relational wellbeing is the foundation that supports both. When we connect authentically, the body releases oxytocin and dopamine, neurochemicals that help calm the nervous system and build trust. We’re literally built to thrive through connection.”

Kindness in Practice: Small Acts, Big Impact

Even tiny moments of authentic connection have measurable effects on the brain and body. The Friendship Institute offers these research-backed ways to practice kindness and transform the holidays from hollow to heartfelt:

1. Name It to Tame It

When emotions go unnamed, the brain stays in stress mode. UCLA research shows that labeling what you feel—even a simple “lonely” or “overwhelmed”—reduces fear-center activity and restores clarity.

Kindness starts with self-awareness. Clarity quiets chaos.

2. Reach Out, Even Briefly

Studies from the University of Chicago and University of Kansas reveal that short, genuine interactions with acquaintances, the barista, a neighbor, a coworker, increase happiness and lower stress hormones.

Connection doesn’t require perfection; it only requires presence.

3. Be the Gift of Presence

MIT’s Human Dynamics Lab found that consistent social rituals increase cohesion by 50%. Create a simple rhythm: a weekly check-in, a gratitude text, a shared meal.

Rituals of kindness become anchors of belonging.

“Being around people doesn’t automatically create togetherness, intention does,” says Donna

Brighton, co-founder and friendship coach. “When we slow down, reach out, and show up authentically, friendship becomes the bridge from isolation to belonging.”

Listen and Learn More

The Friendship Matters podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and all major streaming platforms.

For more resources on friendship, connection, and wellbeing, visit www.friendshipinstitute.org. Because this World Kindness Day, and every day after, the greatest act of kindness may simply be to intentionally connect.

About the Friendship Institute

The Friendship Institute transforms isolation into meaningful belonging by equipping people with the skills and confidence to build real friendships that support wellbeing, resilience, and a more connected life.

Founded by Lisa T. Grimes, Donna Brighton, and Dr. Russell Greenfield, the Institute blends neuroscience, leadership psychology, and integrative medicine to make connection a measurable skill—not a matter of luck.

Learn more at www.friendshipinstitute.org

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