

Lonely Bunny 孤独を跳び越えて

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2nd Year 2学年

Think about rabbits. They are cute, right? They are so charming, adorable, and loveable and that you want to hug these fluffy creatures tight. But, did you know rabbits die if they are lonely? If they lose their partner, the trauma has such a horrific impact on their mental health, it can cause them to die. In fact, loneliness is a severe cause of stress for many social animals, including humans.

I used to be a lot like a rabbit. I would always stick with somebody else to avoid feeling lonely. Unfortunately, this rabbit got in a more difficult situation. Last year I went to public school in Australia and lived with my aunt. In Australia, instead of “friends,” they say “mates.” Mates are close but also “closed.” I would always see mates on Instagram having fun, but whenever I asked to join them, they were always busy. Instead of going out with my classmates, I studied for 10 hours per day. I didn’t really care about my schoolwork. I was obsessed with studying because I was lonely.

Have you ever felt lonely? According to a worldwide survey by the BBC, “40% of people aged 16-24 said they felt lonely ‘often’ or ‘very often.’” And, just like rabbits, loneliness kills people, too. It’s as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. All of this means we cannot ignore loneliness. But, what do we really know about it?

Actually, the feeling of loneliness might be vital to our survival. According to the Evolutionary Theory of Loneliness by the neuroscientist John T. Cacioppo, loneliness has the essential function of encouraging people to interact, which improves our chances of survival. Therefore, the feeling of loneliness is not an enemy, it is a warning sign that you need to interact with other people.

My aunt was concerned about my study habits and lack of friends. So, she introduced me to a psychotherapist. My first session was very relaxing. The therapist welcomed me, I sat down on a comfy couch and had some chamomile tea. She started our conversation with a warm smile: “How was your day?” I answered her, “There is no place to feel secure and nobody comes up to talk to me or interact with me.” She gave me some advice: “It is useless to expect others to interact with you because you can’t control others, but you can control yourself and how you react to others behavior.”

John Cacioppo agrees with her advice. He says the most effective treatment for loneliness is changing how you think about yourself and other people. However, this is easier said than done, especially on your own. For me, seeing a therapist helped me change my mindset, care less about what others thought of me, and finally allowed me to enjoy my own company—to be alone without being lonely. In Japan, going to see a therapist for your mental health is stigmatized. But if you were sick, you would go to the doctor, right? So, why not go to therapy if you need help? The key is don’t be afraid of loneliness. Being hungry is hard, but you shouldn’t ignore your hunger. Listen to your loneliness the same way.

Even if you aren't lonely, perhaps a person next to you might be. We can work together to help each other. So I’m asking you today: treat your friends more like rabbits. Show that you care about them and want to protect them from loneliness.