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[Why Teens and Twenties Need a "Third Place"](#)

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In the face of two teens who recently conducted mass shootings in Dallas and Tallahassee, we are sadly reminded one of the most pervasive issues facing young people today is loneliness. So much so that the United States Surgeon General [said](#) in 2023 that Americans are experiencing "an epidemic of loneliness that affects both our emotional well-being and our physical health". This opinion has been corroborated by a recent [poll](#) from the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which found that 30% of young American adults (ages 18-34) report being lonely every day or several times a week. According to the [CDC](#), persistent feelings of loneliness can be extremely detrimental to health. They link loneliness to increased risk for type 2 diabetes, depression, suicide, dementia, and lower life expectancy.

While it has become a vital tool for communication, the internet has atomized us in many ways. Social media algorithms are incentivized to keep us neatly within our comfort zones, making it hard to explore new interests and meet people who don't share the same point of view. This is especially true in today's volatile political world and toxic internet echo chambers.

Finding a place to converse with new people and engage with the community is essential. Such a location is described by American psychologist Ray Oldenburg as a "third place". These are separate spaces from home (first place) or work (second place). They include libraries, churches, community centers, participatory sports groups, and hobby gatherings. Finding connections in these types of spaces allows you to engage with a wider breadth of people with diverse thoughts and ideas. Additionally, socializing in third places has proven to have positive health outcomes. The [CDC](#) reports that being better connected with others helps protect against serious illnesses and diseases and is even linked to longer and healthier lives.

So, where can these third places be found? While they may seem elusive, third places can be easily searched online. A classic location to visit is a library. These buildings have served as centers of knowledge and community for generations. Searching your local library's website yields a variety of activities, including book clubs, speaker events, and chess clubs. A game like chess is especially suited to facilitating socializing, as the game's developments provide a continual topic of conversation. Using this government [link](#) will allow you to search libraries near you.

What if you don't live near a library? Well, you might find yourself more drawn to a sports group. For example, searching for your state on [Road Runners Club of America](#) could connect you to fellow runners. [USA Track and field](#) offers clubs and a competitive running environment with a breadth of track, running, throwing, and jumping events. [USA Swimming](#) could connect you to casual or competitive swim teams. Other physical clubs involving sports like basketball, tennis, flag football, regular football, rugby, and soccer are also great alternatives.

You can find these groups through [USA Basketball](#), [USTA](#), [American Flag Football League](#), [USA Football League Finder](#), [USA Rugby](#), and [GotSoccer](#), respectively. Physical clubs like these have proven to be especially good for mental health. Johns Hopkins Medicine [reports](#) that consistent running is linked with improved working memory and better task-switching ability. These extracurricular activities are especially well-suited for young children who need an outlet for excess energy. A local [YMCA](#) would also accommodate.

If you especially feel called to help people, there are a plethora of organizations seeking keen volunteers. For example, searching for local food banks at [Feeding America](#). Additionally, the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) also provides many opportunities and resources to help children. If you are more religiously inclined, volunteering at your local church could also be another option. Through [Churchfinder](#), you can find a church near you regardless of denomination.

Each person's journey in finding community is not a one-size-fits-all experience. While the internet is often blamed for people's isolation in the present day, it can also be a remarkable tool. By simply searching for clubs related to your special interests near your location, finding extracurricular communities has never been easier. Even if no opportunities arise, you can create your own third space by starting a book club or organizing board game nights.

While hunting for a third place may seem daunting, the exploration of new people and ideas makes the journey worth it. Some people call them third places, but the term effectively means finding groups and avoiding doom-scrolling on the internet. Even if you don't end up immediately forming any close friendships, there is satisfaction in exploring yourself through discovering new interests. Who knows? You may end up finding something you didn't know you were looking for.

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