

Thanatology

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disability](#)



Define social death and describe some specific ways in which it is manifested. Social death is described as a concept that “ is defined situationally by observing how a person is treated by others. ” (Kastenbaum, 56) Even if an individual is trying to be part of a group, they may be disregarded or rejected. Any person can experience social death because we are all at the mercy of our peers. All people are looking to be accepted and feel like they are part of something greater than themselves.

There are many ways that social death can occur. One of the most common occur because of a marriage. In some cultures, if an individual marries someone out of their religious or ethnic group they can experience social death. The individual may be ousted by their group, whether it is family, church, or peers. The individual would likely be completely cut off from that particular group. Social death can also occur if an individual violates some type of law.

In western society if a person violates a law they can be jailed and they “ may also strip a person of the rights of citizenship, and the church may excommunicate. ” (Kastenbaum, 56) On the same note, in a different culture a tribal person may be subjected to a “ bone-pointing ceremony” (Kastenbaum, 56) where an individual may face a symbolic execution. They may also take away the individuals property and redistribute it among the tribe. Another way a person may be exposed to a social death is by having a physical or mental disability.

Many times people who are institutionalized are treated less like a person and more like an object. The individual may be ignored or avoided which leads to a social death. Another social death can occur when an individual

has a terminal illness. Many people do not want to acknowledge an individual's pending death, so they pretend as though the dying person is not there. Unfortunately, a social death may be the only option for an individual when people cannot accept that someone is dying.

The worst part of this type of social death is that most times the dying person is still very much alive and aware of what is going on around them. No matter what the reason a social death must be the worst feeling. An individual must feel a sense of being unimportant and unloved when experiencing a social death. When a person is constantly ignored or discounted it is a deep emotional event that can cause the individual to think less of themselves. " The concept of social death recognizes that when we die on the eyes of others, we may become somewhat less of a person. " (Kastenbaum, 56)