Loneliness

Explains loneliness, giving practical suggestions for what you can do and where you can go for support.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

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Coping with loneliness

Feeling lonely isn’t in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem increases your chance of feeling lonely, and feeling lonely can have a negative impact on your mental health.

Although most people need some kind of social contact to maintain good mental health, everyone has different social needs. You may be someone who is content with a few close friends, or you may need a large group of varied acquaintances to feel satisfied.

Below are some tips which might help you to cope with feelings of loneliness.

- Think about what is making you lonely
- Make new connections
- Open up
- Take it slow
- Be careful when comparing yourself to others
- Check how you are feeling
- Get some help
- Read others’ stories

Think about what is making you lonely

Being alone is not the same as being lonely. There is nothing wrong with being on your own if you are comfortable with it.

If you’re visiting this page however, something probably feels wrong for you.
People usually describe feeling lonely for one of two reasons:

- they simply don't see or talk to anyone very often
- even though they are surrounded by people, they don't feel understood or cared for

Deciding which is the case for you may help you to find a way of feeling better.

“My anxiety and depression isolates me from people, stops me from being able to do the things I’d like to do.”

“As a new mum, I expected there to be many other mums to meet up with but I felt like I was left behind.”

“I started feeling lonely because I felt nobody understood or knew how I felt, nobody was able to empathise with me.”

New connections

It can be helpful to think of feeling lonely like feeling hungry. Just as your body uses hunger to tell your body you need food, loneliness is a way of your body telling you that you need more social contact.

That means the simplest way to ease feelings of loneliness can be to try to meet more, or different, people.

- Can you think of anything you’re interested in, a class or a group you’ve heard of, that could help you connect with new people? See useful contacts for ideas of how to find groups that interest you.

“Talking to people online has helped me find an understanding support network and makes me feel less alone.”

- Volunteering is a good way of meeting people. Helping others can also really help improve your mental health. See useful contacts for organisations that can help you find local volunteering opportunities.

- Join an online community. See useful contacts for some suggestions.

We're not saying it's an easy thing to do. If reaching out sounds overwhelming, take a look at some of our ideas in Take it slow for inspiration, or read Lee or Scott's stories below about how they found ways to meet new people.

> Read Joanna's blog about how peer support helped her cope with loneliness
> Read how volunteering has helped Scott make new connections
> Read Kate's blog on joining a boxing class has made her feel better
Open up

You might feel that you have plenty of connections, but what is actually wrong is that you don't feel close to them, or they don't give you the care and attention you need.

In this situation it might help to open up about how you feel to friends and family. If you don’t feel comfortable opening up to the people you know, you could try making new connections (see Make new connections).

Take it slow

If you’ve felt lonely for a long time, or even if you’re surrounded by people, it can be terrifying to think of trying to meet new people, or opening up to people for the first time.

But you don’t need to rush into anything.

- Start off by going somewhere like a cafe, the cinema or a sports event where you can be around people, but not be expected to talk to them.

  “Be brave and reach out to someone. It doesn’t have to be face to face; you could share a post on social media.”

- If you’re going to a group or class, see if someone you know will go along with you the first time, or ask whoever runs the class or group if you can just go along and watch at first.

- Go somewhere it’s not expected that you’ll interact straight away, like a class where everyone is focused on an activity.

- Ask your GP if talking treatments are available in your area which could help you manage the mental health effects of loneliness.

- Visit our online support community Elefriends. It’s a safe and supportive environment where you can talk about your mental health, without fear of judgement, with others who share your experience.

- See our info on finding support online and see how you might be able to make connections through social media.

Be careful when comparing yourself to others

It is very hard to stop comparing ourselves to others, we all do it, but it can help to just be aware that things are not always what they seem from the outside.

Social media, and the fact that we very often only see what other people want to share about their lives, can make us feel like we are the only ones feeling lonely.

It’s important to remind yourself that you don’t know how people feel when they are alone, or when their social media feeds are turned off.
If you’re worried that social media might be affecting your mental health see our information on staying well online.

**Check how you are feeling**

How are you feeling generally? Feeling lonely can be very stressful and can have a big impact on your general wellbeing, which might make it even harder to make positive steps to feeling better.

Think about how some of the following are affecting how you feel and whether you can do anything to change them:

**Sleeping**

Getting too little, or too much sleep can have a big impact on how you feel.

> See our info on sleep problems

**Stress**

We might associate stress with things like work or family pressure, but research has show that being lonely also causes a lot of stress.

> See our info on managing stress or tips on how to relax

**Moving**

Our mental and physical health are closely linked. Taking up sport or exercise can help you feel better in lots of different ways.

> See our info on physical activity, sport and exercise

**Eating**

Exploring the way what you eat affects your mood might help you to feel better.

> See our info on food and mood

**Self-esteem**

Feeling lonely can have a big impact on your confidence and self-esteem, which can only make it harder to open up and make new connections.

> See our info on improving your self esteem

**Mental health**

If you’re mental health is having a bit impact on feeling lonely, you could try seeking more of different treatment for it.
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Ask for help

You don't have to go through this on your own. Lots of organisations can help you make connections.

- Call, text or email our Infoline to see if they can help you find a local group or service.
- See if one of our 140 local Minds has a peer support, befriending or other service that might help you.
- See our list of other organisations that might be able to help.

Read others' stories

Craig blogs about his experiences of peer support through social media, and offers some tips for anyone seeking support online.

> Read Craig’s story

Michelle blogs about how she overcame the loneliness caused by her mental health problem.

> Read Michelle’s story
Useful contacts

Mind’s services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
  - Mind’s Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
  - Mind’s Legal Line – 0300 466 6463, legal@mind
  - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as **talking treatments**, **peer support**, and **advocacy**. Find your local Mind here, and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our Elefriends page for details.

Who else could help?

**Age UK**

0800 169 65 65
[ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)
Advice and information for older people.

**Carers UK**

0808 808 7777
[carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)
Independent information and support for carers.

**Contact the Elderly**

0800 716 543
web: [contact-the-elderly.org](http://contact-the-elderly.org)
Social activities for people over 75 with little or no social support.

**Do-it trust**

Website advertising volunteering opportunities
[doitrust.org](http://doitrust.org)

**Empty Closets**
emptyclosets.com
Online community for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, curious or unsure.

Gingerbread
0808 802 0925
gingerbread.org.uk
Advice and practical support for single parents.

LGBT Consortium
lgbtconsortium.org.uk/
Directory of services and groups for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard
0300 330 0630
Support and information for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in the UK.

Meetup.com
meetup.com
Website that allows you to find face-to-face groups of people who share your interests or aspirations.

Mumsnet
mumsnet.com
Online community for parents

Netmums
netmums.com
Online community for parents which facilitates local meet-ups.

NCVO
ncvo.org.uk
Database of local volunteer centres

Relate
Counselling for adults with relationship difficulties.

Samaritans

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK
Chris, PO Box 90 90
Stirling FK8 2SA
helpline: 116 123
jo@samaritans.org
samaritans.org
24-hour support for anyone in distress or despair.

Side by Side

mind.org.uk/sidebyside
Services to help people with mental health problems meet others across nine areas.

The Silver Line

helpline: 0800 4 70 80 90 (freephone)
thesilverline.org.uk
Provides support, information, advice and friendship to older people (over the age of 55) who may feel lonely or isolated. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Volunteering England

volunteering.org.uk
Information about volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering Wales

volunteering-wales.net
Information about volunteering opportunities.

Web of loneliness

webofloneliness.com
Online community and website which provides information and tips on loneliness. Also allows users to share artwork and poetry.

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References are available on request.