



Loneliness

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

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About loneliness

We all feel lonely from time to time. Feelings of loneliness are personal, so everyone's experience of loneliness will be different.

One common description of loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. But loneliness is not always the same as being alone.

You may choose to be alone and live happily without much contact with other people, while others may find this a lonely experience.

Or you may have lots of social contact, or be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely – especially if you don't feel understood or cared for by the people around you (see our information on the [causes of loneliness](#)).

“One thing I've learned is the difference between feeling alone and feeling lonely - and how you can feel lonely in a crowd full of people, but quite peaceful and content when alone”

Is loneliness a mental health problem?

Feeling lonely isn't in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem can increase your chance of feeling lonely.

For example, some people may have misconceptions about what certain mental health problems mean, so you may find it difficult to speak to them about your problems (see our pages on [tips for dealing with stigma](#)).

Or you may experience [social phobia](#) – also known as social anxiety – and find it difficult to engage in everyday activities involving other people, which could lead to a lack of meaningful social contact and cause feelings of loneliness.

“I want to be able to interact with people and make new connections but my anxiety feels like an invisible barrier that I can't break through”

Feeling lonely can also have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if these feelings have lasted a long time. Some research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including [depression](#), [anxiety](#), [low self-esteem](#), [sleep problems](#) and increased [stress](#).



"My anxiety and depression isolates me from people, stops me from being able to do the things I'd like to do so socially it cuts me off"

What causes loneliness?

Loneliness has many different causes, which vary from person to person. We don't always understand what it is about an experience that makes us feel lonely.

For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely, such as:

- experiencing a [bereavement](#)
- going through a relationship break-up
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- starting at [university](#)
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks.

Other people find they feel lonely at certain times of the year, such as around Christmas.

Some research suggests that people who live in certain circumstances, or belong to particular groups, are more vulnerable to loneliness. For example, if you:

- have no friends or family
- are estranged from your family
- are a single parent or [care for someone else](#) – you may find it hard to maintain a social life
- belong to minority groups and live in an area without others from a similar background
- are excluded from social activities due to mobility problems or a shortage of [money](#)

- experience discrimination and stigma because of a disability or long-term health problem, including mental health problems
- experience discrimination and stigma because of your gender, race or [sexual orientation](#)
- have experienced [sexual or physical abuse](#) – you may find it harder to form close relationships with other people.

“When I suffered from anorexia it fed into so many areas of life. It was all consuming. One of those areas was loneliness. It was something that I felt for such a long time”

Some people experience deep and constant feelings of loneliness that come from within and do not disappear, regardless of their social situation or how many friends they have.

There are many reasons people experience this kind of loneliness. You might feel unable to like yourself or to be liked by others, or you may lack [self-confidence](#).

Thinking about what is making you feel lonely may help you find a way of feeling better. See our page of [tips to manage loneliness](#) for more information.

How can I manage loneliness?

This section has some tips and suggestions for managing feelings of loneliness. Some people find these ideas useful, but remember that different things work for different people at different times. Only try what you feel comfortable with, and try not to put too much pressure on yourself. If something isn't working for you (or doesn't feel possible just now), you can try something else, or come back to it another time.

Take it slow

If you've felt lonely for a long time, even if you already know lots of people, it can be terrifying to think about 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 – you may find that simply being around other people is enough to help with your feelings of loneliness.
- If you're going to a group or class, you could 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.

Make new connections

If you are feeling lonely because of a lack of satisfying social contact in your life, you could try to meet more, or different people.

- Try to **join a class or group** based on your hobbies or interests. See our page of [useful contacts](#) for ways to find groups that interest you.
- If you are able to, **volunteering** is a good way of meeting people. Helping others can also really help improve your mental health. It is also a good idea to check that you will receive adequate support from the organisation you are volunteering at. See our page of [useful contacts](#) for organisations that can help you find local volunteering opportunities.

[Read how volunteering at a Mind shop helped Spencer overcome his feelings of loneliness.](#)

Try peer support

There are many different types of peer support service, which provide people with a space to use their own experiences to help and support each other, including experiences of loneliness and related mental health problems.

These are some different types of peer support which you may find useful:

- Try a **befriender service**. Various charities offer telephone and face-to-face befriender services, which put volunteer befrienders in touch with people feeling lonely. See our page of [useful contacts](#) for details of organisations that run befriender services.
- Join an **online community** like [Elefriends](#). These communities can provide a place to listen and share with others who have similar experiences. They are available 24/7, most are free and you can access them wherever you are. See our pages on [online mental health](#) for some more suggestions.
- Contact [Mind's Infoline](#) or a [local Mind](#) to see what other types of peer support there may be in your area.

[Read how Rabia's feelings of loneliness and isolation inspired her and a friend to start their own award-winning women's group.](#)

Try to open up

You might feel that you know plenty of people, 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 speaking with a therapist or a using a peer support service.

"Be brave and reach out to someone. It doesn't have to be face-to-face; you could share a post on social media"

Talking therapies

Talking therapies allow you to explore and understand your feelings of loneliness and can help you develop positive ways of dealing with them. For example, therapy can provide a space for you to discuss the emotional problems that make it hard for you to form satisfying relationships.

If anxiety about social situations has made you feel isolated, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may help. This focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour, and teaches you coping skills for dealing with different problems.

See our pages on [talking therapies](#) and [CBI](#) for more information on these and other kinds of therapy.

Social care

While there is no legal solution to loneliness, there may be ways in which the law can help you if you have needs for care and support.

The Care Act 2014 in England and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in Wales place general obligations on local authorities to promote wellbeing and to prevent social care needs from arising.

They also contain specific duties for local authorities to help individuals. See our pages on [health and social care rights](#) for more information. You can also contact [Mind's Legal Line](#) with your specific enquiry.

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.

For example on social media, we very often only see what other people want to share about their lives, and this can make us feel like we are the only ones feeling lonely.

It's important to remind yourself that you don't know how other 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 [online mental health](#).

And if you have a lack of confidence in yourself or your life when compared to others, and you think that this might be contributing to your feelings of loneliness, our information on [self-esteem](#) may help.

"I sometimes feel lonely when I am overwhelmed by human information – the news, social media, TV, negative gossip etc. – I feel so separate and different to most people"

Look after yourself

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:

- **Try to get enough sleep.** Getting too little or too much sleep can have a big impact on how you feel. See our pages on [sleep problems](#) for more information.
- **Think about your diet.** Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can make a difference to your mood and energy levels. See our pages on [food and mood](#) for more information.
- **Try to do some physical activity.** Exercise can be really helpful for your mental wellbeing, and some people find it helps improve their self-esteem. See our pages on [physical activity and mental health](#) for more information.
- **Spend time outside.** Spending time in green space can help your wellbeing. See our pages on [nature and mental health](#) for more information.
- **Spend time with animals.** Some people find spending time around animals can help with feelings of loneliness, whether through owning a pet or spending time around animals in their natural environment. If you find being around animals helpful, you could try visiting a local community or city farm - the organisation Social Farms and Gardens has [a list of outdoor community projects across the UK](#), many of which have animals available to the public.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** While you might want to use drugs and alcohol to cope with difficult feelings about yourself, in the long run they can make you feel worse and can prevent you from dealing with underlying problems. See our pages on [recreational drugs and alcohol](#) for more information.

"I never feel lonely when I'm in nature. I feel more connected than ever when I'm walking alone through a wood or by a river"

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 Cymru (Wales)

08000 223 444

ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Information and support for older people.

Age UK (England)

0800 678 1602

ageuk.org.uk

Information and support for older people.

Befriending Networks

befriending.co.uk

Information on befriending, including an online directory of UK befriending services.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

01455 883 300

bacp.co.uk

Professional body for talking therapy and counselling. Provides information and a list of accredited therapists.

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

0800 58 58 58

thecalmzone.net

thecalmzone.net/help/webchat/

Listening services, information and support for anyone who identifies as male.

Carers UK

0808 808 7777

carersuk.org

Advice and support for people caring for someone else.

Contact the Elderly

0800 716 543

contact-the-elderly.org

Social activities for people over 75 who have little or no social support.

Cruse Bereavement Care

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0808 808 1677

cruse.org.uk

Information and support after a bereavement.

Do-it

do-it.org

Lists UK volunteering opportunities.

Empty Closets

emptyclosets.com

Online community for anyone aged over 13 who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, or is curious or unsure.

Gingerbread

0808 802 0925

gingerbread.org.uk

Advice and practical support for single parent families.

LGBT Consortium

lgbtconsortium.org.uk/directory

Directory of services and groups for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Meetup.com

meetup.com

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

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

ncvo.org.uk

Information about volunteering, including details of local centres.

Relate

0300 003 0396

relate.org.uk

Provides help and support with relationships, including counselling, telephone counselling and anonymous live chat.

Samaritans

116 123

jo@samaritans.org

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

samaritans.org

24-hour emotional support for anyone who needs to talk.

Scope

scope.org.uk

Provides practical information and emotional support for disabled people.

The Silver Line

0800 4 70 80 90

thesilverline.org.uk

Provides support, information, friendship and advice for older people (over 55) who may feel lonely or isolated.

Social Farms & Gardens

farmgarden.org.uk

Information on care farming and community growing projects, including a network of local farms.

Student Minds

studentminds.org.uk

Mental health charity that supports students.

Victim Support

0808 158 9111

victimsupport.org.uk

Provides emotional and practical support for people affected by crime and traumatic events.

Volunteering Wales

volunteering-wales.net

Information about volunteering opportunities in Wales.

Web of Loneliness

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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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To be revised in 2022

References are available on request.