

OA FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is about loneliness. It aims to provide information and guidance and to highlight other sources of support available.

LONELINESS

Loneliness can affect us all at some point in our lives. For many of us, particularly those in later life, loneliness can often define us and significantly impact our wellbeing.

There is a common misconception that being alone will mean feeling lonely; this isn't always the case. Many people choose to spend time alone and enjoy their own company. Others may feel lonely when surrounded by people.

This fact sheet aims to provide information and guidance on dealing with loneliness and a practical starting point for other sources of help and support if needed.



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WHAT DOES BEING LONELY MEAN?

According to the mental health charity Mind, loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not being met.

Some significant life experiences can make you feel lonely, particularly in later life. For example, you may have moved to a new area, your partner may have died, children may have moved away, health problems may make it harder to remain socially engaged.

Although there may be a reason for feeling lonely, sometimes it may be hard to pinpoint a specific cause as to why you started to feel this way. Know and accept that all feelings are valid and okay. Being aware of what can affect your mental wellbeing may help you understand the feelings you're experiencing and help you think about steps you can take to look after yourself.

HOW YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

When you're feeling lonely, you may believe that no one wants to hear from you or spend time with you but often people do want to help and offer support. If there are people around you who you can talk to, it can be a good idea to share with them how you're feeling and what you can do together to alleviate your sense of isolation. This might be a difficult first step to take. However, talking about how you're feeling is likely to help improve your overall wellbeing.

There is no one way to effectively deal with loneliness but different approaches can help. Some people find reaching out to others is the best way to deal with their loneliness while others prefer to cope with their loneliness by remaining alone.

Remember, you are not alone; support is available.



CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Catch up with old friends

Friendships require time and effort to maintain. Reach out to your friends by picking up the phone, contacting them through social media, or arranging to meet for coffee. You may feel they are busy and won't have time for you, but you may be surprised if you take the first step to connect with them.

Invest time in new connections

Joining groups based on your interests is one of the best ways of making new connections. Think about hobbies and activities you enjoy or perhaps something you would like to learn and see if there are any groups or classes in your local area. Volunteering is another excellent way to get involved and meet new people. On the NVCO website, you can find out more about [how to become a volunteer](#) and [find your nearest Volunteer Centre](#).

Connect online

Technology is a great way to keep in contact with friends, and it also allows the opportunity to meet new people with similar interests. There are often free courses offered in libraries and in community centres to help improve skills in this area. Many Age UK branches offer Silver Surfer classes.

SUPPORT SERVICES

It can be hard admitting to feeling lonely, and you may want to keep your thoughts to yourself. However, opening up about how you think may help you find others who have experienced similar thoughts. Access to Talking therapies can be obtained from your GP or you can self-refer to the [NHS Improving Access Psychological Therapies \(IAPT\)](#) service.

You may wish to find out about formal social arrangements such as Befriending, where you are matched with an individual with similar interests to your own who can then contact you via phone or in person. Charities such as Age UK, The Silver Line, Independent Age, and Sense offer these services. [The Befriending Network](#) has a directory of services in the UK which is a good option if you find leaving your home difficult.

[Community Connectors and Navigators](#) can help you access local services, groups and activities to help you cope and improve your overall health and wellbeing. You can talk to your GP about how to access these services.

If you prefer to manage alone, you may wish to consider the following which may help ease your feelings of loneliness.

- **Write a gratitude list**

Psychological research has shown that gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve health, deal with adversity and build strong relationships.

The key to getting started is taking small steps; write a list every evening of three things you are grateful for. This can be the simplest of things such as enjoying a hot cup of tea/coffee, taking the time to go for a walk or spending time in the garden or park. You could even look back at happy memories to help maintain a more positive frame of mind.

- **Spend time outdoors**

Going outside regularly, whether that's in your garden or a walk to the park, library or local high street, is a great way of feeling engaged with the outside world. It can help you feel more connected to your neighbourhood and enjoy the natural world and local environment.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

- **The Silver Line** Provides support, information, friendship and advice for older people (over 55) who may feel lonely or isolated. Free to use, confidential and available 24hrs a day. 0800 4 708090 www.thesilverline.org.uk
- **Age UK (England)** Information and support for older people. 0800 678 1602 www.ageuk.org.uk
- **Age Cymru (Wales)** Information and support for older people. 0800 223 444 www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru
- **Befriending Networks** Information on befriending, including an online directory of UK befriending services. www.befriending.co.uk
- **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)** Provides listening services, information and support for anyone who needs to talk, including a web chat. 0800 58 58 58 www.thecalzone.net
- **Carers UK** Advice and support for anyone who provides care. 0808 808 7777, 029 2081 1370 (Carers Wales) www.carersuk.org
- **Cruse Bereavement Care** 0808 808 1677 www.cruse.org.uk
- **Do-it** Lists UK volunteering opportunities. www.doit.life
- **Gingerbread** Advice and practical support for single parent families. www.gingerbread.org.uk
- **Meetup.com** A website that allows you to find face-to-face groups of people who share your interests or aspirations. www.meetup.com
- **Reengage** Social activities for people over 75 who have little or no social support. www.reengage.org.uk
- **Relate** Provides help and support with relationships, including counselling, telephone counselling and anonymous live chat. 0300 003 0396 www.relate.org.uk
- **Samaritans** Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can visit some Samaritans branches in person. Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on 0808 164 0123 (7pm-11pm every day). 116 123 (freephone) www.samaritans.org
- **Scope** Practical information and emotional support for disabled people. 0808 800 3333 www.scope.org.uk
- **Social Farms & Gardens** Information on care farming and community growing projects, including a network of local farms. www.farmgarden.org.uk
- **Web of Loneliness** Online community and website which provides information and tips on loneliness. Allows users to share artwork and poetry. www.webofloneliness.com



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**EVERY OFFICER
EVERY FAMILY**



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