

COVID-19 ISOLATION & LONELINESS SUPPORT

Isolation

If you have moved away from friends and families, if you don't know your local community, or if you have a partner who works long hours, often away from home, particular in times of self-isolation around the current circumstances of COVID-19.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the unpleasant feeling we have when there is a mismatch between the social relationships we want, and the ones that we have.

Am I alone, or lonely?

There is a difference between being alone, and feeling lonely. Solitude – being alone – is different to loneliness. Lots of people live alone, but do not feel lonely because they have social relationships and connections that they want and need.

Mental health charity Mind says loneliness is about '*not feeling part of the world*'. Loneliness makes you feel emotionally isolated – like you're not connected to people, or you don't belong.

9 million people in the UK report feeling lonely, sometimes or often. It's normal to experience loneliness, and it's important that we normalise it to break down the stigma. It can occur at any time, but there are also triggers to feeling lonely. Loneliness is like hunger or thirst; it's our bodies telling us that we need social contact. Remember that millions of people experience loneliness – it's not a failing.

Why do I feel lonely?

Loneliness can occur at any time, but there are also triggers to feeling lonely. There are lots of reasons why you might feel lonely. Some of these include:

- Moving to a new city or country
- Starting university
- Social isolation due to medical or health reasons
- Falling out with your friends, or just growing apart
- A relationship breaking up
- The death of someone close to you
- Having to care for a family member

Social media and technology can also exacerbate loneliness. Sometimes it can help us to make new friends and connections, and meet people who share our interests and passions. But it cannot replace real face-to-face contact and interaction. If it does, it can be isolating and make us feel lonelier.

How does loneliness affect my health?

Human beings are naturally social, so being lonely isn't good for us. Loneliness can be as bad for physical health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or obesity. It can also contribute to feelings of anxiety, stress and depression, and have a negative impact on our mental health. Feeling lonely and isolated affects our self-esteem, and we can think that people won't want to talk to us or be friends. You won't feel like this forever – it's really just the loneliness talking.

Why are feelings of loneliness increasing?

There is still a great deal of stigma about loneliness. Last year, the Campaign to End Loneliness research found that over half of British adults say that admitting to loneliness is difficult.

There are lots of reasons why loneliness is on the rise. Our research found that almost half (49%) of UK adults say that their busy lives stop them from connecting with other people. Young people can feel disconnected from their communities because many rent and feel unable to put down roots. Our opportunities for small moments of connection – such as small talk at the bus stop – have been reduced, because we're often plugged into our phones. The result of all these factors is growing loneliness and isolation. Issues such as illness and unemployment also make loneliness much more likely. Carers are vulnerable to loneliness, and can feel cut off from friends. Remember, loneliness is not about someone's "personality"; it can be driven by factors such as health and economic status.

How can I stop feeling lonely?

Think about what you would like more of. Time with friends or family?

- Skype with friends and family to still stay connected
- Enjoy regular exercise or walks, please be aware of the government guidance around COVID-19.
- Drink plenty of water and eat well, a healthy body will support your immune system and ensure your mind is healthy
- Spend time reading and enjoying
- Chat and community forums

If loneliness is getting you down, talking to someone can really help. You may want to consider counselling to explore how you're feeling. You can still access the services of the EAP provided by Care first on 0800 174 319 which is 24/7.

You can also contact the following for support throughout this period if you have any concerns.

- Contact [Samaritans](#) on **116 123** (free 24-hour helpline)
- Contact your GP to arrange an emergency appointment or call the NHS out-of-hours medical line on **111**