



GUIDE TO LONELINESS

WE ARE A CHARITY DEDICATED TO RECOGNISING AND
RAISING AWARENESS OF LONELINESS, AND HELPING
PEOPLE MAKE NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

WRITTEN BY MARMALADE
TRUST AS PART OF OUR
ANNUAL CAMPAIGN -
LONELINESS AWARENESS
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WHO WE ARE

Marmalade Trust is a UK charity with a very clear mission, 'to create a society where we recognise that loneliness exists and support each other to find new social connections'.

We want to encourage people to see loneliness as a blank canvas on which they can fill their lives with new friends and experiences - and we're here to help them do it.

Chronic loneliness is one of the biggest health concerns we face, and it's on the rise. Nine million people in the UK – more than the population of London – are always or often lonely.

But, by building our understanding of loneliness, we can help ourselves and others to manage the feeling.



WHAT IS LONELINESS?

We all feel lonely at times – it's a normal human emotion. We're biologically wired for social contact, and loneliness is our signal that we need more.

The definition: Loneliness is a perceived mismatch between the quality or quantity of social connections that a person has and what they would like to have [1].

WHY DO I FEEL LONELY EVEN WHEN I'M NOT ALONE?

You don't have to be on your own to feel lonely - you might feel lonely in a relationship or while spending time with friends or family – especially if you don't feel understood or cared for by the people around you. Other people might choose to be alone and live happily without much social contact.

Loneliness can also be characterised by its intensity, or how strongly it is felt, which can change from moment to moment and over different durations of time [2].

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LONELINESS?

There are different types, including:

- **Emotional loneliness** - When someone you were very close with is no longer there. This could be a partner or a close friend.
- **Social loneliness** - When you feel like you're lacking a wider social network of friends, neighbours or colleagues.
- **Transient loneliness** - A feeling that comes and goes.
- **Situational loneliness** - Loneliness which you only feel at certain times like Sundays, bank holidays or Christmas.
- **Chronic loneliness** - When you feel lonely all or most of the time.

WHO EXPERIENCES LONELINESS?

Most of us will experience loneliness at some point in our lives, regardless of age, circumstance and background. We all experience loneliness differently.

It's a common misconception that loneliness is limited to older people. In fact, it's now the 16-24 year olds who are the loneliest age group in the UK [3].

WHAT CAUSES LONELINESS?

There are key life points which will increase the likelihood of feeling lonely. Some examples are:

- Moving away from home
- Starting university or a new job
- Becoming a new parent
- A relationship break-up
- Suffering a bereavement
- Retirement

HAS LONELINESS ALWAYS BEEN AN ISSUE?

Human beings evolved to feel safest in groups, and as a result, we experience isolation as a physical state of emergency.

Imagine if you lived in a tribe and while you were out hunting, you found yourself alone. You'd be under serious threat without the protection of your group - your levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, would rocket up, and would stay raised until you're back with your tribe [4].



WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF LONG-TERM LONELINESS?

There has been lots of research on the effects of loneliness for our mental and physical health – it's seen as one of the biggest health concerns we face.

Loneliness has been linked to early deaths and an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression, cognitive decline and poor sleep. It's as harmful to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

People who feel lonely are more than twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's (and other forms of dementia) than those who do not feel lonely [5-7].

If you've been feeling lonely for a long time, make an appointment to see your GP to make sure that you are getting the right support.



SHOULD WE CHANGE THE LANGUAGE AROUND LONELINESS?

Telling someone that you're lonely is an important step but it's also important to be mindful of how we talk about it.

We still use words like 'admitting' to and 'suffering' from, which can unintentionally add to the belief that something is wrong with us.

There is absolutely no shame in feeling lonely and changing the language around loneliness is a positive and liberating step forward. The more we talk about it, the more we normalise it and we can move towards a society where it can be spoken about openly.



CASE STUDY ALISON - 39



"I love spending time with my young kids. But some days I feel so lonely, which isn't a nice feeling. I signed myself up to some virtual parenting groups and I mentioned how I was feeling. Turns out, plenty of other parents felt similarly. I realised even though I was with my family all day, I felt lonely because I was yearning for some grown-up conversation and connection!"

OUR 3 STEP APPROACH

Loneliness can often feel overwhelming and something out of our control, so it can be useful to have a starting point. To help you and others to feel less lonely we have framed it into three parts...



Acknowledge loneliness in yourself or others

Identify what you or they need

Take the appropriate action



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ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge it and don't feel embarrassed.

Loneliness is a very normal human emotion. As human beings, we are biologically wired for social contact. Most of us will experience loneliness at some point in our lives, regardless of age, circumstance and background. There are key life points which will increase the likelihood of feeling lonely, like moving away from home, starting uni or a new job, becoming a new parent, going through a divorce or suffering a bereavement.

Loneliness is a bit like feeling hungry and thirsty. Much the same as when our bodies are telling us that we need to eat or drink something, loneliness is a sign that we need to pay attention to the amount of social contact we're having.

Think about how you describe loneliness.

Telling someone that you're lonely is an important step but it's also how we talk about it. We still use words like 'admitting' to and 'suffering' from, which can unintentionally add to the belief that something is wrong with us. There is absolutely no shame in feeling lonely and changing the language around loneliness is a positive and liberating step forward.

The more we talk about it, the more we normalise it and we can move towards a society where it can be spoken about openly. When you tell someone that you're feeling lonely, or someone is telling you, try to discuss it in a neutral and open manner. Remember that loneliness is normal.

We believe that loneliness should be accepted and understood more, rather than something that necessarily has to be eradicated.



IDENTIFY

Reach out and tell someone.

Look at your life and try to identify the areas where you do have support or someone to talk to. Can you talk to a family member or a friend? Or is there someone at work or in your community you can reach out to? When we've been lonely for a long time it can start to affect our mental health and wellbeing. If you feel that is the case, make an appointment to see your GP to make sure that you are getting the right support.

When you're lonely it can feel like there is no one there for you but loneliness isn't something that can always be noticed from someone's outward appearance. It's not that people don't care or aren't there for you, it's more likely that they don't know how you are feeling. It goes two ways: once you start reaching out to people, they will respond accordingly and your social network can start to flourish.

Know what you need.

We're all different and we all need varying levels of social contact. Some of us like to have face-to-face interaction several times a day. For others it's a regular phone call, or being part of an online group or forum. What does your mood feel like if you go a few days without seeing or speaking to anyone?

Some people will find a busy social life too overwhelming, so it's about finding the level of contact that you feel comfortable with. Work out what you need and then look at how you can fill those gaps in your life with the right amount of connections. It's also important to distinguish the difference between being alone and feeling lonely. Many people are happy with their company for much of the time and find it to be a positive experience. We might be a loneliness charity but we believe in having enough beneficial alone time!



ACTION

Build up your daily community.

We live in a world where a lot of the time, we don't really connect with people for work, shopping or leisure activities. Or we might live away from friends and family and feel like we don't have a local network or community.

Think of the ways you can build connections back into your daily life. For example, shopping locally in the same places or choosing a staff-manned check out at the supermarket rather than always using self-service, or walking regularly in your local park or outside space. Even the smallest things like seeing the same faces on a regular basis, or saying hello to your neighbours will help you feel more anchored to a community.

While we're here, what does the idea of a daily community feel like to you? What does it stand for and who is in it? All of us will have a different idea: depending on our personal circumstances and whether we live in a city, town, village or a remote rural location. What community connections are available to you and how can you make the most of them? If you don't feel there is something there for you, how can you build up the contact or a sense of community that you feel you're currently lacking?

Use technology proactively.

Technology has been blamed for rising levels of loneliness but it can still be good for social interaction. Social media is still a great way to connect with others but notice how it makes you feel when you use it.

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Do you feel happier and more connected, or the opposite? Instead of scrolling through other people's time lines, use social media to join new groups or like-minded communities so you feel part of something.

In real life, try swapping communicating via a screen for a real life interaction. Meet up with a friend or call someone for a chat, rather than WhatsApping or emailing them. Does using social platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook make you feel more or less connected? It may be time to look at different ways of communicating that suit you more (i.e more real life interactions and fewer online ones).

If we don't use the Internet it can feel like the rest of the world is online, which can make us feel even more shut out. If you feel you'd benefit socially from being online, look into Internet courses at your local library or community centre. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there are also lots of telephone activities which you can get involved in, including reading groups, reminiscence chats and exercise classes.

Finding friends.

Whether you live in a bustling city or a rural village, most places have opportunities to meet new people. Could you start a course, or do some sort of physical exercise, or take up a new hobby as a way to meet like-minded people who have similar interests?

Volunteering is also a great way to meet new people and feel part of a cause or community. Research shows that being kind to others increases our own levels of happiness as well as theirs.

HELPING YOURSELF AND OTHERS FEEL MORE CONNECTED

Over the next few pages, we've put together some top tips for understanding loneliness and helping yourself and others feel more connected. If loneliness continues for some time, it can start to affect your health and wellbeing. In this case, it's important to reach out to your GP and make sure you're getting the right support.

We have devised these tips with COVID-19 social distancing measures in mind. Please do make sure you adhere to the up-to-date guidance from the UK Government.

UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS AT HOME

**SEND A LETTER
OR POSTCARD
TO SOMEONE
ISOLATING BY
THEMSELVES**

**SHARE YOUR
EXPERIENCES
OF LONELINESS
ON SOCIAL
MEDIA**

**ARRANGE TO
WATCH A FILM
AT THE SAME
TIME AS A
FRIEND AND
VIDEO CALL**

**ORGANISE A
WEEKLY VIDEO
CALL WITH
FRIENDS OR
FAMILY**

**PICK UP THE
PHONE AND
CALL OR TEXT
A FRIEND**

**ARRANGE A
VIDEO CALL
WITH
SOMEONE YOU
HAVEN'T SEEN
IN A WHILE**

**START OR JOIN
A VIRTUAL
BOOK CLUB,
FILM CLUB OR
PUB QUIZ**

**SOME PEOPLE
FIND TALKING
WHILE
WALKING
EASIER THAN
FACE TO FACE**



UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

**START OR JOIN A WHATSAPP OR
EMAIL GROUP FOR YOUR STREET. IT'S
A GREAT WAY TO CONNECT WITH
YOUR NEIGHBOURS**

**ASK ISOLATING
NEIGHBOURS
IF THEY NEED
HELP WITH
GROCERIES OR
ERRANDS**

**HAVE A CUPPA
WITH A
NEIGHBOUR,
KEEPING THE
APPROPRIATE
DISTANCE**

**REACH OUT TO
A LOCAL
CHARITY AND
VOLUNTEER
YOUR
SUPPORT**

**REACH OUT TO
SOMEONE YOU
KNOW
EXPERIENCING
LONELINESS
OR ISOLATION**

**SHOP LOCAL, IT
CAN BE A
FRIENDLY
PLACE TO SAY
HELLO**

**SMILE AND SAY
HELLO TO
PASSESS BY.
EVEN FROM A
DISTANCE IT
CAN MAKE A BIG
DIFFERENCE.**



UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS

AT SCHOOL

**STORY TIME!
READ A BOOK
TOGETHER
ABOUT
LONELINESS**

**ASK STUDENTS
TO SHARE
WHAT THEY
KNOW ABOUT
LONELINESS**

**EXPLORE
WHEN OR WHY
PEOPLE MIGHT
FEEL LONELY**

**DISCUSS WHAT
MIGHT HELP
SOMEONE
WHO IS
FEELING
LONELY**

**DRAW A
PICTURE OF
WHAT
LONELINESS
FEELS LIKE**

**WRITE LETTERS
TO PEOPLE
WHO ARE
ISOLATING IN
THE
COMMUNITY**

**REMEMBER TO
DISCUSS
LONELINESS
OPENLY AND
POSITIVELY.
LONELINESS IS
A NORMAL
EMOTION AND
THE STIGMA
SURROUNDING
IT TENDS TO
DEVELOP
WHEN WE GET
OLDER**



UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS AT WORK

**HOST A
WEEKLY
SOCIAL TO
CATCH UP
WITH
COLLEAGUES**

**ENCOURAGE
EMPLOYEES TO
REACH OUT TO
HR IF THEY ARE
FEELING
LONELY**

**'MEET' A
COLLEAGUE
FOR A VIRTUAL
COFFEE OR
LUNCH**

**EMAIL SUPPORTERS OR CLIENTS TO
LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU'RE
DOING TO COMBAT LONELINESS
AND INCREASE UNDERSTANDING**

**ASK A
COLLEAGUE
HOW THEY'RE
FINDING THE
CHANGE IN
ROUTINE**

**SPEND SOME
TIME BUILDING
STRONGER
EMPLOYEE AND
TEAM
RELATION -
SHIPS BY
GETTING TO
KNOW EACH
OTHER BETTER**



THANK YOU FOR READING OUR GUIDE TO LONELINESS

STAY IN TOUCH

Be sure to follow our social media pages, they're the best way to receive updates on our projects and campaigns, including our annual awareness campaign which takes place every June.



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