Understanding loneliness one conversation at a time

OUR LONELINESS TOOLKIT

A brief guide to loneliness and tips on connecting, co-produced by Marmalade Trust and The Great Get Together
LONELINESS AWARENESS WEEK

Loneliness Awareness Week is hosted by Marmalade Trust and runs from 15th – 19th June 2020. This year we are encouraging everyone to increase their understanding of loneliness by joining our ‘One Less Lonely Voice’ campaign.

We want everyone to get involved and understand loneliness one conversation at a time. More information can be found here:

MARMALADETRUST.ORG/LAW

THE GREAT GET TOGETHER

The Great Get Together is inspired by Jo Cox, who was killed on the 16th of June 2016. In her first speech in Parliament, Jo said, “We have more in common than that which divides us”.

Through the Great Get Together, we ask people across the country to embrace Jo’s words and celebrate the power of community. For this year’s Great Get Together, though we can’t be together as we normally would, we can still connect together. Join us from 19th - 21st June to build connections:

GREATGETTOGETHER.ORG/SIGN-UP
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: 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 AM 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.

Over 9 million people in the UK, almost a fifth of the population, say they are always or often lonely [3].

It’s a common misconception that loneliness is limited to older people. In fact, it’s now the 16-24-year old’s who are the loneliest age group in the UK [4].

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

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.

HOW CAN YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO IS LONELY?

We’re all different and we all need varying levels of social contact.

If someone tells you they are lonely, rather than rushing to suggest lots of new things for them to do, take the time to ask what they need and what they think they’d like to do.

We often assume in a well meaning sense that others are the same as us, when actually we all have very different needs and interests.
SEND A LETTER OR POSTCARD TO SOMEONE ISOLATING BY THEMSELVES

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES OF LONELINESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ORGANISE A WEEKLY VIDEO CALL WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY

PICK UP THE PHONE AND CALL OR TEXT A FRIEND

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

REACH OUT TO A LOCAL CHARITY AND VOLUNTEER YOUR SUPPORT

ASK ISOLATING NEIGHBOURS IF THEY NEED HELP WITH GROCERIES OR ERRANDS

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

SMILE AND SAY HELLO TO PASSERS BY. EVEN FROM A DISTANCE IT CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.
GET INVOLVED!

LONESSE AWARENESS WEEK 15TH-19TH JUNE
To take part in Loneliness Awareness Week, head to the Marmalade Trust website where you will find eye-catching graphics and animations to share on your social media pages, plus loads of tips for building your understanding of loneliness. You can also take our loneliness pledge:

MARMALADETRUST.ORG/LAW

THE GREAT GET TOGETHER 19TH-21ST JUNE
Join The Great Get Together from 19th - 21st June to build connections and celebrate the power of community. That could be something in your street or neighbourhood, like a cuppa over the hedge with your neighbour, or it could be something online or on the phone, like calling that friend you’ve not spoken to in ten years! There are plenty of ways to get involved on The Great Get Together website:

GREATGETTOGETHER.ORG/SIGN-UP

REFERENCES

MARMALADE TRUST  THE GREAT GET TOGETHER