

Help and advice on how to cope with loneliness and improve your mental health

Dealing with loneliness can be difficult. But there are things we can all do to cope with loneliness and prevent some of the negative feelings and mental health problems that can come with it. Here are some coping strategies that you might find useful.

1. Try to do some enjoyable things that will keep you busy

One way of trying to manage loneliness is by keeping busy and doing things we enjoy. This might be a hobby such as a bit of gardening, going to the gym or even sorting out your kitchen cupboards, jigsaws, puzzles or knitting.

Small activities can give you energy and positive feelings. It's important these things are fun or fulfilling.

Be careful about working too hard or watching TV shows simply as a distraction. These will only delay or suppress your feelings and could actually make your mental health worse.



2. Try to do things that stimulate your mind

Activities that occupy your mind can help with loneliness. This can include the benefits of taking courses or listening to podcasts on topics from comedy to fitness. This can be stimulating and something as simple as listening to the familiar voice of someone you like can help you feel less lonely.

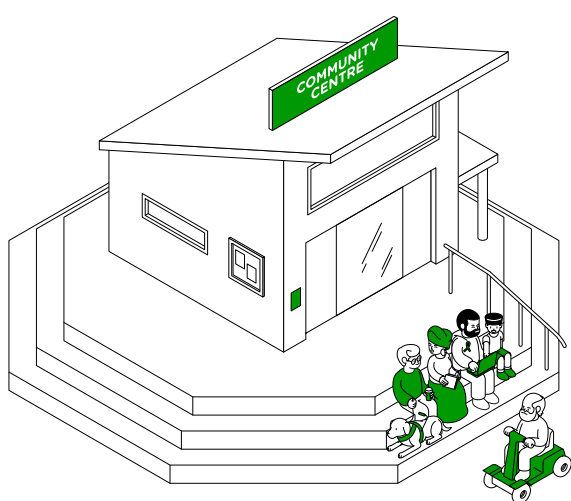
3. Think about doing a physical activity

Physical exercise can help with loneliness. It can be as simple as having a walk in the park when you're feeling a bit overwhelmed. Alternatively, you could listen to music and do a bit of dancing around your living room. (Be aware of your neighbours though!)



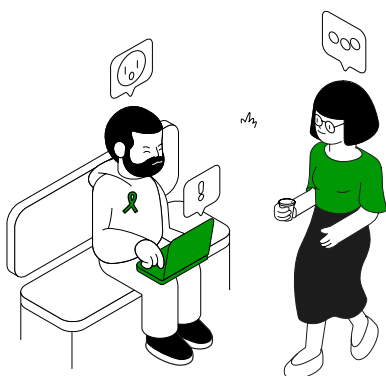
4. Try to engage with the people you meet in your daily life.

It can be hard to talk to others when you're feeling lonely. However, **trying to connect with the people you meet as you go about your day can be helpful.** Even catching someone's eye and saying "hi" as you walk along can make you feel better. Or it could be about saying hello to the postwomen or postman or going to the shops and talking to the person at the checkout. By sharing a polite greeting – you might find you give someone else a positive lift too.



5. Find people that 'get you'

It can be hard to connect with others when you're feeling lonely. But there are great benefits in finding people who have been through similar experiences to you. **Interacting with others that 'get' you can give you a sense of belonging that may be missing.** People who have been there have found connections in local groups or social media.

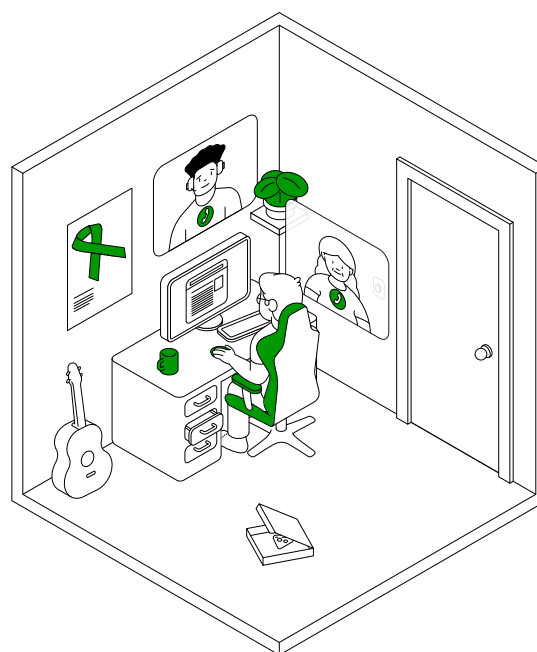


6. Spend time with pets

If you are lucky enough to have a pet, it can be a great way of managing loneliness. Not only do animals provide us with unconditional love and support, but they also help to give structure to our days and even encourage us to get out and connect with others. Interaction with pets is also **shown** to help reduce stress levels.

7. Try to use social media in a positive way

Social media can help your mental health. But it can also affect it negatively. **The key is to use it in a positive way. Finding digital communities, you share interests and passions with can help.** Most importantly be aware of how you feel when you use social media and focus on topics and activities that work best for you.



8. Talking therapies can help

Talking through your feelings with a counsellor or therapist can help you cope with your feelings of loneliness. Talking therapy can be hard to get – but if you can find a professional, it can really be of benefit. It'll provide you with a safe space to work through your feelings and thoughts without judgement. Check out your local resources **by visiting the NHS website.**

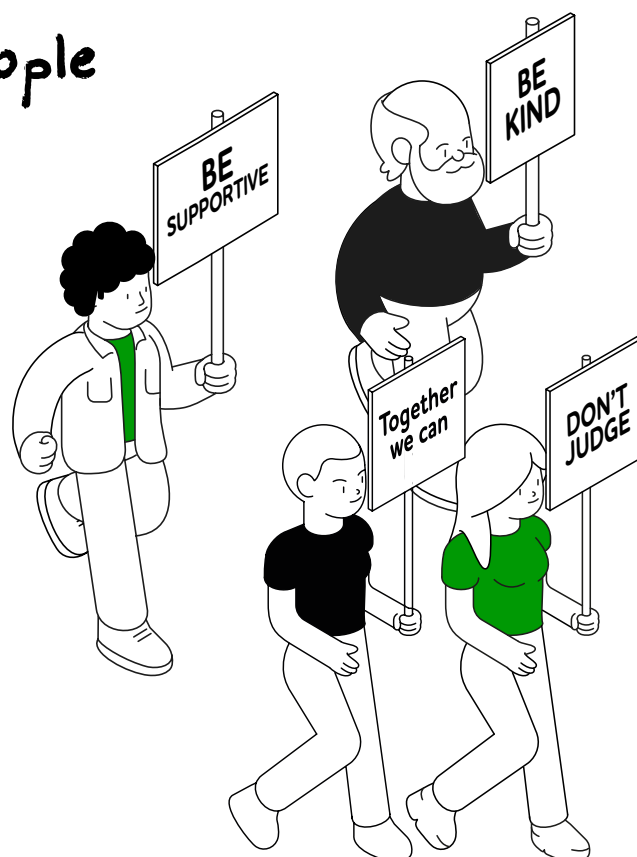
How to support other people who are feeling lonely

1. Don't judge or stigmatise

It's important not to judge or stigmatise people who feel lonely. Stigma around loneliness is a huge barrier to the kind of open and genuine conversations that can help. It's more important to be aware of just how common loneliness is. It's a normal feeling that all of us are likely to experience at some time in our lives. Telling other people that their poor mental health is the reason why they are feeling lonely is really not helpful.

2. Try to make groups welcoming to other people

It can be difficult for people who are feeling lonely to join a group like a club. This might be because people are shy or feel nervous about existing relationships in the group which they don't feel part of. It's important to be aware of this and try to make groups be as welcoming as possible to newcomers. Flexibility around things like how often people attend is also important.



3. Try to listen and show understanding

A great way to help a friend or family member is simply to listen. People who have experienced loneliness relate how they valued friends who really considered what they might enjoy and were even willing to join them in some shared activities. Having an understanding and compassionate approach, and not ignoring the person's experience, will help them to feel heard and understood.

Methodology: These recommendations for coping methods are informed by our review of the published literature, focus groups with people sharing their insights of experience of chronic loneliness, and a survey of Mental Health Foundation OPEN community.

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