

THRIVING CONNECTIONS

This document contains key information about loneliness: why is it bad for us? what are the risk factors? what solutions can alleviate loneliness? This information is based on the BBC programme 'The anatomy of Loneliness'.



Loneliness

The perceived discrepancy between desired and realised social contacts.

(Peplau & Perlman, 1982)

Social Isolation

Being separate from others, without other people around us, e.g. not having people we can turn to in a crisis.

Why is loneliness bad for us?



The links between loneliness and its harmful physical and mental health consequences are complex.



People who are chronically lonely can get stuck in a loop of negative behaviour, and might push others away.



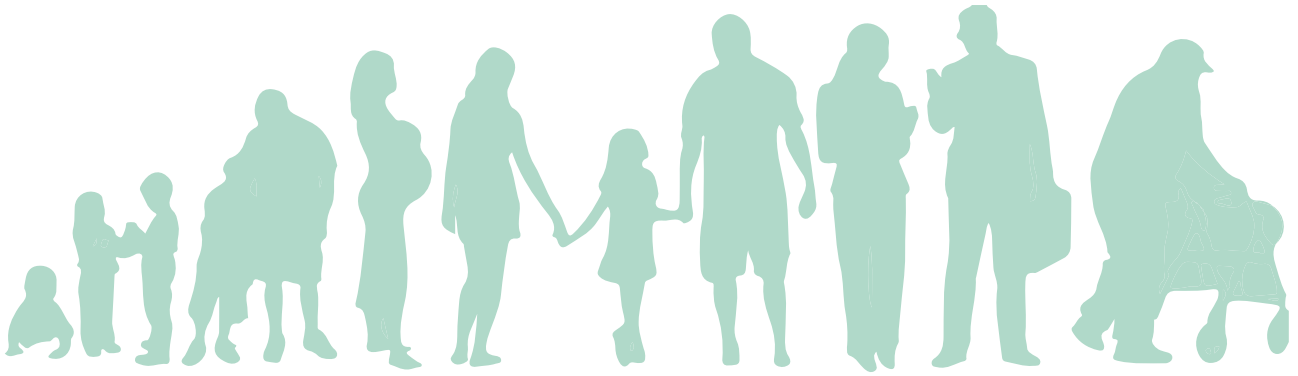
Loneliness can potentially reduce access to social norms and peer pressure to conform.



Loneliness is linked to drinking alcohol, having unhealthier diets and taking less exercise than the socially contented. Especially with middle-aged adults. Causality has not been established.



Drug abuse and bulimia nervosa are linked to loneliness.



Loneliness through the life course

any time



Loneliness can occur at any time. The nature of our loneliness differs according to the life stage we are at.



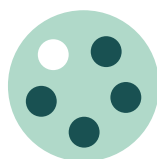
transition

Some people may feel more vulnerable at certain times of our lives including major transitions such as moving home or job, bereavement, divorce or separation, the arrival of a new baby or the departure of an older child from the family home.



cut off

Situations that cut us off from the mainstream of society, such as unemployment, poverty, mental illness or old age, also put us at a heightened risk of feeling lonely, as do those in which people need an unusual level of support: disability, drug or alcohol addiction, caring for a relative or being a lone parent.



minority

A lot of minority groups experience significantly less loneliness as a consequence of their cultural and/or religious beliefs.

In the BBC's Loneliness experiment

involving 55,000 people

- 1 16-24 year olds are reported to be the most lonely in the cohort.
- 2 Loneliness declines with increasing age.
- 3 Higher levels of mistrust are associated with loneliness.
- 4 Young mums are particularly vulnerable to loneliness.
- 5 Female carers report higher levels of loneliness.

Solutions to loneliness that have helped those that responded

There is no one solution or thing that will help, it depends on the individual.

We should not be looking to eradicate loneliness, as it can have positive effects such as greater empathy and greater creativity. 40% reported that loneliness had a positive and negative dimension.



1/ Distraction

Doing activities that distract you or dedicate time to work or hobbies. This is a good strategy when loneliness is temporary and not long lasting, not a long-term solution.



2/ Join a social club and take up new activities and pastimes

Finding something that is meaningful to you.



3/ Change your thinking to make it more positive

Loneliness can make people feel negative and lead to people isolating themselves. Changing this view - being kinder to yourself and about others can lead to more positive interactions.



4/ Talk to family and friends about your feelings

There is a stigma to sharing our feelings and loneliness. Find someone you can share these with.