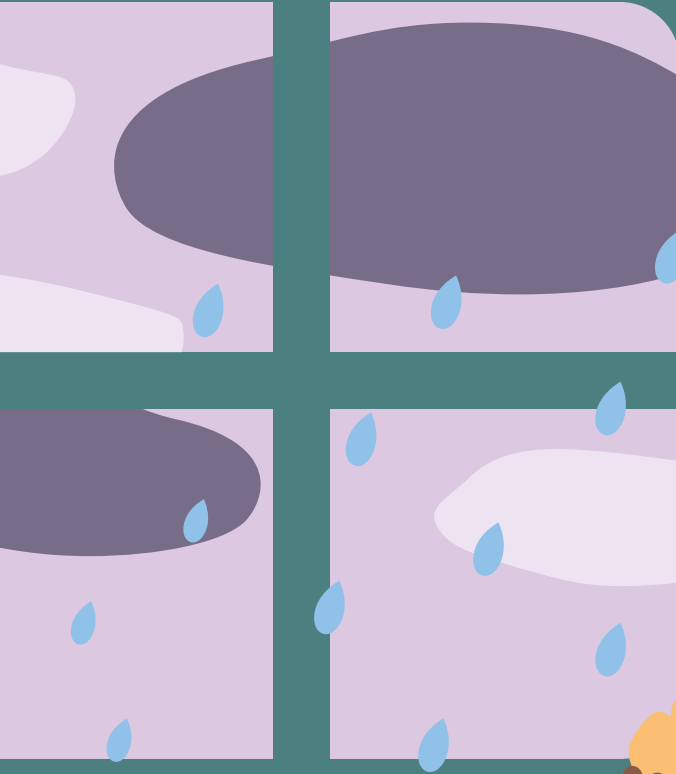




by young parents,
for young parents



Mental Health
Foundation



A young parent guide to

loneliness

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What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the difficult feeling we have when there is a difference between the relationships we have and those that we want.

We asked young parents in the UK what loneliness means to them. Almost a quarter answered using the word 'people', and almost all related the experience to relationships.

Loneliness is something we can all experience from time-to-time. For example, [research](#) has shown that **more than eight in 10 young mums feel lonely sometimes.**

"For me, it sounded silly saying **I felt alone when I have a baby with me 24/7.** But sometimes you crave adult company and conversation, there is nothing silly about it I have realised."

"You are not alone. Sometimes those who have the most people around them, feel the loneliest. **There is nothing wrong with you,** it's a normal feeling especially just after a baby."



How we experience loneliness will be different for each of us. Young parents described loneliness as:

"[Loneliness] means **not having anyone to turn to** but it's not necessarily being physically lonely but emotionally lonely for me. Loneliness [can be] being in a room full of people and still feeling completely on your own."

"[Loneliness is] an empty feeling where in your darkest moments you have **no one to turn to for comfort** and in your highest moments you have **no one to share your joy.**"

How can loneliness affect mental health?

Mental health is made up of our thoughts, feelings, mood, and behaviour. We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health.

"When you begin to feel loneliness, **it feels incredibly numbing and isolating.** Not feeling like you can ask for help, and feeling like you must do everything yourself."

"Loneliness is something we all have different feelings about. For me it usually feels like it's just me floating around not being able to reach out. **The longer you're alone the harder or more daunting it seems to reach out to someone.** It can be a hard cycle to break."

Although loneliness is not a mental health problem, it is an experience that can affect our mental health. Feeling lonely over a long period of time can cause low mood and self-esteem, and increase our anxiety and stress levels.



Young parents described the effect of loneliness on their mental health as:

“Feeling as though you are alone in the world and can’t/ don’t want to **burden** anyone.”

“Feeling empty and **foggy minded...**”

“Feeling isolated, misunderstood and alone. **Unheard and unseen** in situations.”

“[Loneliness is being] **on your own** with everything on your shoulders.”

“Feeling **empty**, drained. Feeling alone.”

Did you know?

- Mothers under 25 are more likely to need help for their mental health.
- Young fathers are more likely to need support with anxiety and depression.

That’s why it’s important as young parents to reach out to others, and be kind to yourself in times of loneliness.

Young parents told us about **what causes feelings of loneliness**, such as feelings of being:

- under-pressure when comparing to others;
- stigmatised and stereotyped;
- socially isolated and excluded;
- unsure of who you are.

“Never look at another individual and think your life should be the same. Your situation is different. **Mentally remind yourself ‘I’m different’ and embrace that difference.**”



Tips for when feeling under-pressure when comparing to others

As young parents, it is common to compare yourself with older parents, and other young people who are not parents.

Comparisons often are about:

- Difference in responsibility and free time;
- Following “traditional” routes through life;
- Reaching educational milestones;
- Opportunities for new experiences;
- Parenting styles.

“I became a mum at 18 years old and now at 24 I’m a mum of 5. I spent the first year of being mum on my own, and feeling looked down on by more ‘mature’ mums. But, it doesn’t define you or your parenting ability, make sure you **go out and be proud of yourself and your baby[ies].**”


There are things we can do to try and not negatively compare ourselves to those around us.

Tip 1

Be mindful of the social media you use

Remember, we **only see what other people want us to see on social media**, and this can make us feel lonely and excluded.

If you are experiencing negative thoughts and feelings when you're on social media, you could unfollow them for a while.



Follow more positive accounts instead that celebrate the realities of parenthood, like:

[@RochelleHumes](#)

[@HappyMumHappyBaby](#)

[@mumsandtea](#)

[@blackmumsupfront](#)

[@wearefeelgoodclub](#)

[@wetheurban](#)

[@staceysolomon](#)

[Read MHF's guide to maintaining a healthy social media life](#)



You could also try **turning off notifications and limiting the time you spend online.**

Taking a break from our screens can give us more time to focus on our ourselves and our relationships.



"I got into listening to podcasts. I am alone a lot as my partner works so I am alone with my baby. All my friends don't live near. The **podcasts make me feel less lonely.**"



Tip 2

Use positive affirmations every day

Understanding why we make the negative comparisons that we do can help us to start turning them into something more positive. Try not to downplay everything you have already accomplished – **recognise your achievements, big and small!**



Listen to Naomi's journey towards self-confidence as a young mum.

"I think remembering firstly that **you are designed to become something great** and even the most lonely moments are moments to self-develop and become a better you for you and your community."

"Look in the mirror, smile and say some positive affirmations. Tell yourself how beautiful you are, **tell yourself that you are going to have an amazing day.**"

Tips for when feeling stigmatised and stereotyped

“I felt looked down upon for being pregnant early, like I was doing things in reverse.”

“Being a parent is hard, when you’re a young parent **you have what feels like the judgement of the whole world.** As if people think you, yourself are still a child and shouldn’t be raising one.”

Young parents still face a lot of stigma and discrimination in the UK. **More than half of young parents under the age of 25 experience stigma because they have a child.**

Stigma can come in many forms, from different people, including friends, family members, and professionals.

Read Carly’s experience of stigma.



GPs, midwives, social workers, and teachers can be the main sources of support for mental health. Yet, for many young parents, the stigma they face is a barrier to accessing this support.



“I made this mistake with my first baby at the age of 16. I didn’t socialise at all because I was scared of judgement. Now with my second at 20, I am going to play groups and interacting with other parents.”

There are ways to address the stigma that still exists, and protect the wellbeing of other young parents.

Tip 3

Use your experience to support others

Spend time with other young parents who may be facing the same challenges. Check-in on them and take turns sharing and really listening to each other's experiences – often we just need to be heard and understood.



[Listen to Rachel's story on becoming a mum.](#)

"Make an effort to call or text. Even if it's just a 'how are you?'

Invite them to things. Even if they might say no, invite them anyway. **Make them feel wanted and included.**

Tell them about things they could be involved in that might interest them."

"Share your experiences about the postpartum. Real experiences. If another mum is struggling with sleepless nights don't brag that your baby is sleeping through. Support her."

"Do an act of kindness, flowers/chocolates so they know they aren't alone. Or reach out to someone close to them and express concerns. Just **one gesture of social kindness may just save someone's life.**"

Tip 4

Raise awareness and be heard

It can be difficult to receive comments and experience situations where you feel looked down upon and stereotyped.

Other people's comments and situations are reflections of those people, NOT you.

One way to feel empowered is to find a space for your voice to be heard.

"Be proud of the parent that you are - **because you're doing amazing.**"

You could try blogging or vlogging to share your experience with other young parents through Little Lullaby, or take over Little Lullaby's social media channels to show other young parents what your day-to-day life is like? Please contact Little Lullaby info@littlullaby.org.uk



"I feel encouraged and confident now, **I feel like I have a voice and I can use it.** My confidence is high and now I'm not that girl anymore that can't speak in my marketing class."

Visit **Little Lullaby** to find out more

You could join their [Young Parent Panel](#) to meet other young parents.





Tip 5

Know your rights

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of factors like age or being pregnant/on maternity leave, amongst others. The law protects you from discrimination whether you are at work, in education, or buying or renting a home and more.

Find out about your rights from [The Young Women's Trust](#).



[Read here to learn more about discrimination and your rights within the UK.](#)



Tips for when feeling socially isolated and excluded

Young parents, but particularly dads, can find it difficult to stay connected with friends after they become a parent. It can also be hard to meet other young parents.

[Read about Rajvi's experience in a peer support group](#)



It may take some time to feel ready to connect with others, and that's OK. It can be helpful to explore different options, either online or offline, to find your own community that makes you feel most comfortable and supported.

"[If you are able to] Join lots of parenting groups that are on the same wave length as you for example, gentle parenting groups, co-sleeping groups, breastfeeding groups. Any group like that have been so helpful for me as I don't feel alone in my choices/path as a parent as **there is always another parent going through something similar to me.**"



Tip 6

Find your community



"[Being part of Facebook groups] is a daily reminder that you're doing a good job – **you can talk about everything, not just kids.**"

Online

- Search for your local young parent groups and networks on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- Connect with other women about being a mum using the [Peanut app](#).
- Follow accounts/people that share the same interests as you.
- You could [join the Little Lullaby community](#) – tell your story, share advice and chat with other young parents!

"I used a lot of the mummy social media apps to meet new younger mums around me, and eventually **made a lot of friends of all ages and felt myself and my little one thriving** with all the social interaction we ended up having."

- Put on a podcast that interests you. Having someone speak can often be comforting and listening to someone regularly is like being with a friend!
- Set up your own parent support group.

[Read Young Mind's guidance on how to set up a parent support group in your community.](#)



“You may find friends in the most unlikely places. Parent groups didn’t work for me, I met my mum best friend at a swimming lesson!”

Offline

- Find people who share your interests.
- Join a religious group who share your values.
- Pick up something you enjoy or used to enjoy before becoming a parent e.g. a sport.
- Find your local parent group.
- Head down to your local community centre or children’s centre.

“Reach out to local support systems and explain how you’re feeling, ask what sort of techniques you can use to help better your situation if you’re unsure.”



Tips when feeling unsure of who you are

"There's **no shame in admitting that you're not in a good head space**, or that you need help. You're only human, and it's ok to feel this way."

"Becoming a parent changes life and emotions completely.. **it's ok not to feel quite right..**"

Tip 7

Remind yourself of what makes you unique

Becoming a parent is a point in our lives where our sense of identity will change. This is a healthy process as we begin to form connections with our baby. However, for some, this can be an unsettling process, feeling unsure of who we are outside of our parent role.

For some, returning to work can be key point of change. You may be feeling uncertain or worried about juggling childcare responsibilities and finding a schedule that fits.

[Listen to Ifeoma and Hazel talk about the negatives and positives becoming a mum can bring for identity.](#)



"Learn to love life and understand that you are where you are meant to be in life. **You are on your own path that was created for you.**"

Take your time. You could write a list of pros and cons about finding work or going back to work.

Speak to someone you trust, or a professional, about how you are feeling.

Tip 8

Take care of yourself

It may feel difficult to find time to look after yourself, you may feel that you don't deserve those moments to yourself. YOU DO!

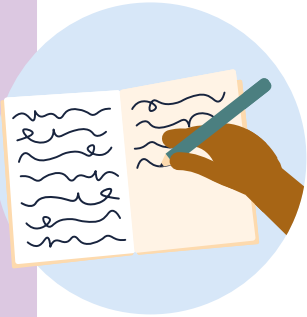
"I always try to be intentional because **I don't deserve to feel like this.**

I want to find somewhere where I can feel like a better me."

Here are some **free or low cost** things you could do to self-care every day



- ✓ Create a daily routine for your family
- ✓ Read 5 pages of a book a day
- ✓ Go for a walk outside, in nature
- ✓ Go for a drink with a friend
- ✓ Journal or write down your thoughts
- ✓ Think about something you're grateful today
- ✓ **REST**
- ✓ Watch something other than kids TV
- ✓ Take a bath or a shower whilst listening to your favourite playlist or podcast



"**Personally when I feel lonely I watch a program I love,** have a swipe through the Peanut app and sign up to a new baby class I've not done before."

This guide, on young parents' experiences of loneliness, has been developed by the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and [The Lullaby Trust](#).

The top tips have been informed by young parents from across the UK, including 342 responses to a survey and a focus group with young parents.

Each year, the Mental Health Foundation hosts [Mental Health Awareness Week](#), one of the biggest campaigns across the UK. The theme for Mental Health Awareness Week 2022 is **loneliness**.



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