



Peer  
Education  
Project



Mental Health  
Foundation



# Loneliness

Finding our connections  
to feel less lonely

**A guide for caregivers**

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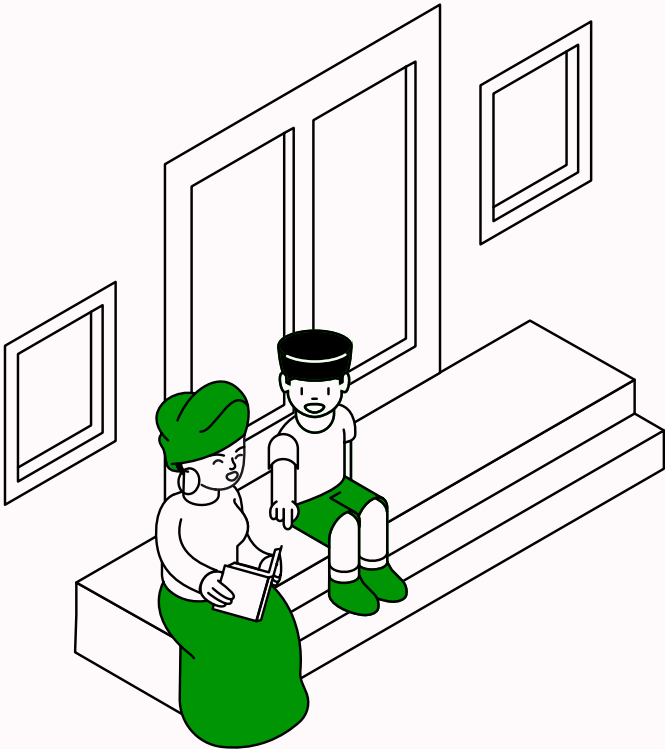
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# While loneliness is a universal emotion, everyone experiences it differently.

It's commonly defined as the feeling we get when there is a mismatch between the relationships we have and those that we need. Loneliness is different to solitude or simply being alone: you can be lonely even when surrounded by people.

**Loneliness is often defined in three ways:**

- **Emotional loneliness:** The absence or loss of a significant other, such as a partner or close friend, with whom you have a meaningful relationship.
- **Social loneliness:** The lack of a wider social network that can provide a sense of belonging and community.
- **Existential loneliness:** A sense of feeling disconnected from others, and as though life is empty and lacks meaning.

Although experiencing loneliness can be difficult, there are things we can do to support ourselves and others with the challenging thoughts, feelings, moods, and emotions that can be associated with loneliness.

**This guide provides tips and resources on how to support yourself as a caregiver, as well as your child or young person with feelings of loneliness.**



# Supporting yourself to show kindness

## Resources to support yourself

### Mental Health Foundation resources

Our vision at the [Mental Health Foundation](#) is for a world with good mental health for all. With prevention at the heart of what we do, we aim to find and address the sources of mental health problems so that people and communities can thrive.

#### [Tips on looking after your mental health](#)

Read these tips on how to look after your mental health.

#### [Mental health podcast on loneliness](#)

Listen to this podcast on what it means to feel lonely, how it affects our mental health, who experiences it and what we can do to cope with it.

#### [Advice on coping with loneliness](#)

Read these recommendations on how to support yourself and others when experiencing loneliness, which have been informed by published literature, focus groups and a survey completed by people with lived experience.

#### [A personal story on loneliness](#)

Read this personal story on experiencing loneliness and depression, and how they built up the courage to speak to people.



### Other resources

#### [Information on loneliness and signposting options](#)

Read Mind's website section on loneliness, exploring the causes of loneliness, how it relates to mental health, what you can do if you are experiencing loneliness, and where to find support.

#### [How to recognise and support someone who may be lonely](#)

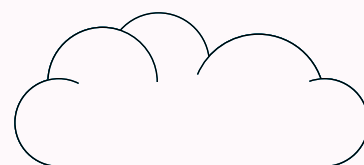
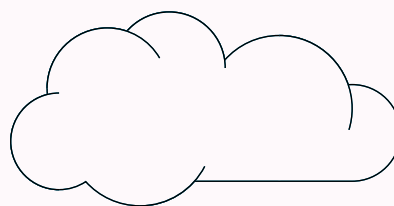
Read this advice by Samaritans on how to support someone who may be experiencing loneliness.

#### [Advice on supporting yourself when feeling lonely](#)

Read this advice from NHS on what to do and where to find support if you are feeling lonely.

#### [Tips on managing loneliness as a parent](#)

Read these tips on how to support yourself if you are feeling lonely.



# Support services for adults

## Samaritans

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk.

Call: **116 123** (free)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Post: Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

The Samaritans Self-Help app is a tool to track how you're feeling and receive tips on things you can do to look after yourself.

Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on **0808 164 0123** (7pm–11pm every day).

## Hub of Hope

Hub of Hope is a UK-wide mental health service database, allowing you to search for local, national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support. You can filter results to find specific kinds of support.

## Mind

Mind offers advice, support and information to people experiencing mental health difficulties, and their family and friends.

InfoLine: **0300 123 3393**

Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm (except bank holidays).

Email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

## Side by Side

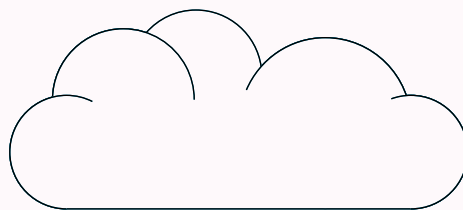
Side by Side, hosted by Mind, is an online community where you can listen, share and be heard. The online community is moderated to keep the community safe and supportive.

## Young Minds

Young Minds provides a parent helpline for parents and caregivers seeking detailed advice, emotional support and signposting about a child or young person up to the age of 25.

Call: **0808 802 5544** (free), available Monday – Friday, 9:30am - 4pm.

Webchat: available Monday – Friday, 9:30am - 4pm.



# Supporting your child or young person with feelings of loneliness

It may not always be easy to spot the signs of when your child or young person is feeling lonely. They may find it difficult to reach out and share what they are feeling. Here are some changes to look out for:

## Social withdrawal.

Are they as sociable as they usually are?

It's ok for your child or young person to spend time alone, we all need moments to ourselves. However, if they begin to spend time alone in a way that is out-of-character, this can be a sign of social withdrawal.

Children and young people who are experiencing loneliness may begin to find social connection an anxiety-provoking experience. It can take time to find people we connect with. Remind your child or young person that there will be many opportunities in life to meet new people and build healthy relationships with those who make us feel like we belong.

## Changes in sleep patterns.

Are they noticeably more tired than usual?

Children or young people experiencing loneliness are likely to have increased levels of stress and difficulty sleeping. Getting good

sleep can be overwhelming for children and young people, but there are many things you can do with your child or young person, to understand and improve their sleep patterns.

## Low self-esteem or a loss of confidence.

Has their engagement with the things they enjoy changed?

When experiencing loneliness, we may not feel our most comfortable selves and may experience low self-esteem. When struggling with low self-esteem, connecting with others may be more challenging and produce feelings of disconnection and further loneliness.

## Feeling frustrated.

Has the way they react to day-to-day situations and people at home changed?

Loneliness can feel uncomfortable and frustrating at times. If your child or young person is struggling with patience and getting frustrated easily, this may be an indicator that there are other feelings going on.

## [MHF Tips for Young People on Loneliness](#)

Share these top tip postcards, written by the Mental Health Foundation, to support your child or young person to feel less lonely.



# Emotional loneliness

**Emotional loneliness is feeling a lack or loss of a meaningful relationship. This can be a loss of a relationship with another person, for example due to moving schools, changes in the home environment, or a bereavement. Your child or young person may also feel disconnected from themselves, unsure of who they are and what they like.**

When experiencing this type of loneliness, finding connections with ourselves can be really helpful. There are many ways to encourage your child or young person to find connections with themselves, such as creating spaces where they can understand, accept, and express their feelings.

## Put in time to do activities together.

Activities where your child or young person can feel comfortable and supported to share how they are feeling could include, going for a walk, playing a game or cooking together.

## Model healthy emotional behaviours.

By sharing how you are feeling, you can positively reinforce that it is ok to share your thoughts and feelings.

## Be mindful that behind every behaviour is a feeling.

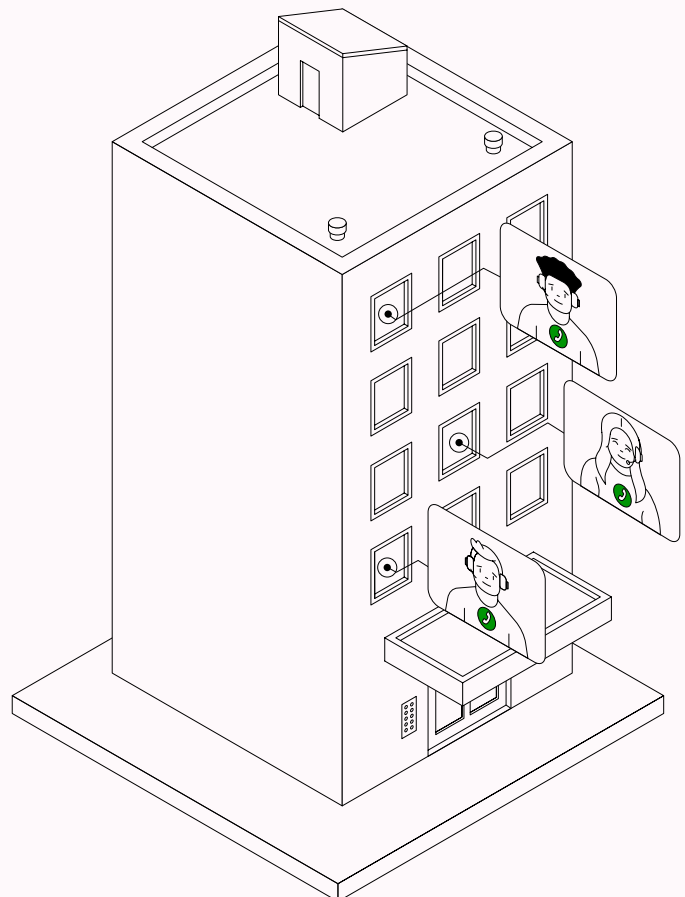
Look out for any significant changes in their behaviour, which might suggest they are in need of more support.

### [A guide on how to talk about difficult topics](#)

Read NSPCC's guide on how to start conversations about 'difficult' subjects with your child or young person.

### [A guide on looking after a child or young person's mental health](#)

Read this guide from Every Mind Matters about how to encourage your child or young person to think about their own mental health and wellbeing.



# Social loneliness

**Social loneliness is feeling a lack of a wider social network of friends, that can often bring a sense of being part of a community.**

By building meaningful connections with others, often with like-minded people, we can feel less lonely. Your child or young person may have both positive and challenging relationships, which may influence their thoughts and feelings.

Being a listening ear and showing interest in your child or young person's relationships, will open lines of communication. This may make it easier for them to come to you when they are struggling with their relationships.

## [Tips on how to listen to your child and their needs](#)

Read this information from Young Minds to develop your own listening skills to support conversations with your child or young person.

Peer relationships are important for children and young people to develop their self-identity and interests. This is especially true during adolescence, when these relationships become a more significant part of their support network. However, sometimes peer relationships can be stressful and difficult to manage.

## [A guide to supporting young people with their friendships](#)

Read this guide by the Children's Society on how to support children and young people with their friendships.





# Existential loneliness

**Existential loneliness means feeling disconnected from the world around us, which can contribute to having a lack of purpose in life.**

Even if your child or young person has meaningful connections with themselves and others, they may still lack a sense of belonging when it comes to wider society.

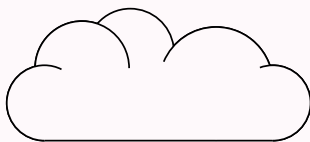
**Find a good time to talk with your child about what they enjoy doing.**

By exploring together their interests and what makes them feel happy, you can remind them to do these when they are feeling lonely, to connect with the world around them.

**Encourage your child or young person to sign up to volunteer opportunities in school, and the local community.**

By exploring together their interests and what makes them feel happy, you can remind them to do these when they are feeling lonely, to connect with the world around them.

**Explore together if there are school-based clubs and community groups that your child or young person could join.**



**Encourage your child or young person to express gratitude.**

By finding moments to reflect on what they have, children and young people can form a good understanding of the people and things they can look to for support when feeling lonely.

**Encourage your child or young person to show acts of kindness, to themselves and others.**

## Social media

Social media can be a useful tool to feel a wider connection and share interests with others. However, it can also be a difficult place for children and young people to navigate and can lead to feeling lonely and negatively affect their mental health.

### [Social media and mental health blog](#)

Read this blog from Childnet offering advice around the impact of social media on young people's mental health.



# Support services for young people

## The Mix

The Mix offers online information as well as helpline support to under-25s about anything that's troubling them.

Email: via their [online contact form](#)

Call: **0808 808 4994** (free)

Telephone services available 4pm – 11pm everyday.

Text: **THEMIX to 85258**

The text service is free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK.

One-to-one chat: Free [1-2-1 webchat service](#)

The webchat is available 4pm – 11pm, Monday to Saturday.

## Childline

A support service for anyone under 19 in need of support.

Call: **08001111** (free)

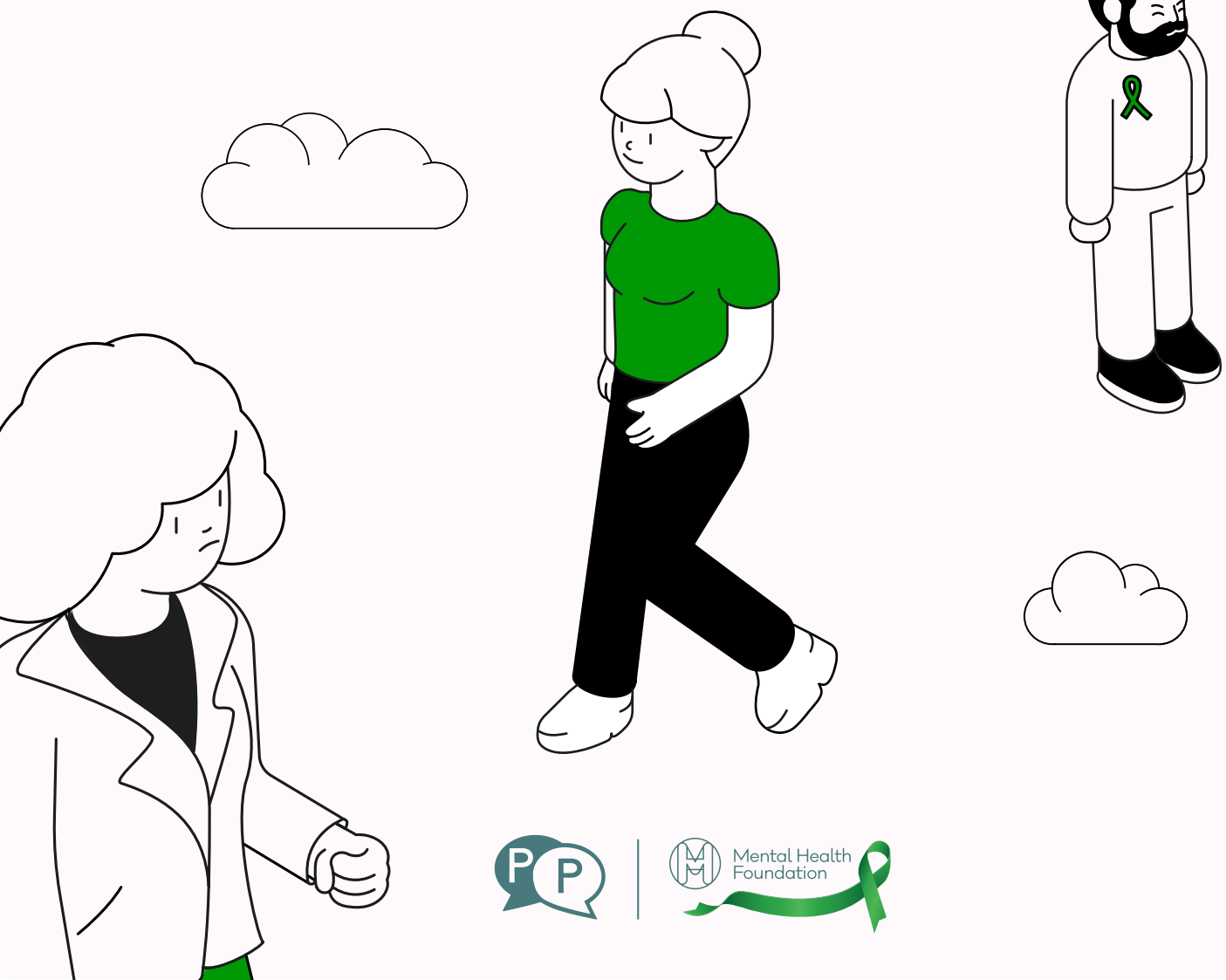
Telephone services available 24-hours a day, every day.

Young people can [sign up](#) for a free Childline locker (real name or email address not needed) to use Childline's free [1-2-1 counsellor chat](#) and email support service.

## Shout

A support text service, available 24-hours a day, every day.

Text: **SHOUT to 85258**





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