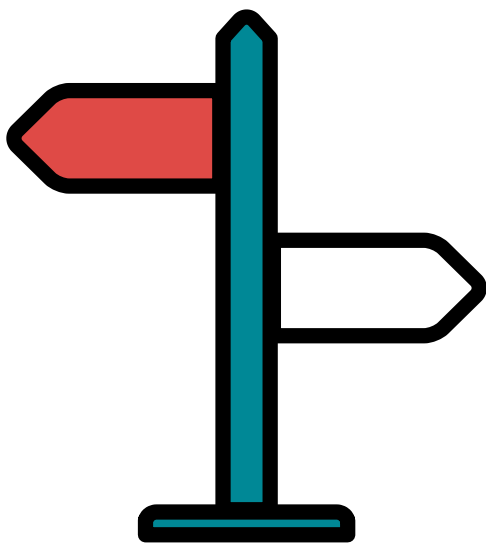


Loneliness Factsheet



Loneliness

There are 1.2m chronically lonely older people in the UK, and probably a considerable number of Freemasons and their widows are included in this figure. Loneliness is associated with sleep problems, impaired cognitive health, heightened vascular resistance, hypertension, psychological stress and mental ill health.

Through regular home visits and telephone contact Almoners are able to pick up on the signs of loneliness and contribute to alleviating it.

Triggers

Several studies have identified a range of factors associated with being lonely in old age. As an Almoner it is helpful to have an awareness of certain life events and understand changes in circumstances which may trigger feelings of loneliness:

- Change or decline in social networks. Living alone, being widowed or divorced, lack of or losing contact with friends and family can mean there are limited opportunities to participate in social occasions and meet others.
- Location. Structures of buildings and streets, provision of local amenities, area boundaries or reputation and location of residency can cause a person to feel isolated if family or friends do not visit or live a long distance away.

- Change or decline in health. Poor health, limited mobility, social care needs or cognitive or sensory impairment can bring about feelings of isolation or loneliness.
- Individual characteristics. Things like age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, employment or financial status can affect personal feelings and may bring about feelings of loneliness.
- Retirement or loss of employment. Loss of social contact and enjoyment of work since retirement or loss of job. Lack of routine or feelings of worthlessness brought about by redundancy can bring about isolation and loneliness.

Spotting the signs

Loneliness is not always obvious to spot, but when speaking with someone there are some clues that you can look out for to help identify whether somebody is feeling lonely, such as:

- A significant change to their daily routine.
- Neglected appearance or personal hygiene.
- Feelings of worthlessness.
- Sudden loss of appetite or weight.
- Loss of a companion or friend.



Support

If you suspect someone you know may be dealing with loneliness, you can help them through:

- Frequent contact – visiting yourself or getting others in the Lodge to visit.
- Encouragement and support – providing support in making new social connections or to access services designed to tackle loneliness.
- Patience – your actions may be misunderstood at first, particularly if loneliness is a result of physical or mental ill health.



Getting help

As Almoner there are many specialist organisations you can refer Lodge members and their families to for support. The following is a selection:

- Age UK's befriending service can connect somebody with a volunteer who can visit or call on the phone – www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/loneliness/befriending-services.
- Age UK also provides details of local friendship groups – www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/social-groups/friendship-centres/.
- Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) runs a telephone book club for people with sight loss. For a small cost somebody can talk to up to eight people on a monthly call – www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-and-support-services-talk-and-support/telephone-book-clubs.
- Independent Age: Offers advice, befriending, and campaigning to combat financial, social, and information poverty in older people – www.independentage.org.uk or call 0800 319 6789.
- Carers Trust: Improving support, service, and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring for a loved one – www.carers.org or call 0300 772 9600.
- Carers UK: Giving expert advice, information, and support to carers – www.carersuk.org or call 020 7378 4999.
- Volunteering is another positive way to build social connections with many vacancies to be found at www.do-it.org.
- In some Provinces there are Masonic clubs and groups for widows and others with shared interests.
- If loneliness is linked to financial status, consider the support available from the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF). This may include help with daily living expenses, supporting children in full time education and one-off expenses. Contact your Provincial Grand Almoner or the MCF on 0800 035 60 90 for advice on making an application.
- Additionally, with loneliness as a result of mobility problems the MCF may be able to help by providing mobility equipment to assist with getting out and about.
- The MCF's Advice and Support Team are able to offer advice, guidance and support on a range of issues and organisations that can help. Contact them by calling 0800 035 60 90.
- Your Provincial Grand Almoner may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

