

LONELINESS

Factsheet

Loneliness can be described as a subjective, unwelcome feeling arising from a lack or loss of companionship. Occurring where there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those we wish for.

Hundreds of thousands of elderly people experience loneliness and are cut off from society in the UK, particularly those over the age of 75. According to Age UK, more than 2 million people over 75 live alone, and over a million older people go more than one month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member.¹

Loneliness is also associated with sleep problems, impaired cognitive health, heightened vascular resistance, hypertension, psychological stress and mental health.

Triggers

Several studies have identified a range of factors associated with being lonely. It is helpful to have an awareness and understand a little more about changes in circumstances which may trigger these feelings:

- **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.

- **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.

- **Location.**

Structures of buildings and streets, provision of local amenities and transport, area boundaries or reputation and location of residency can cause a person to feel isolated if family or friends can't visit or live a long distance away.

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/loneliness-in-older-people/>

- **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.

- **Individual characteristics.**

Things like age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, employment or financial status can affect personal feelings and may bring about feelings of loneliness.

Spotting the signs

Loneliness is not always obvious to spot, but when speaking with someone there are some clues to look out for to help identify whether somebody is feeling lonely. These are:

- 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 somebody you know may be dealing with loneliness you can help them through the following actions:

- **Patience.**

Actions may be misunderstood at first, particularly if loneliness or social isolation is a result of physical or mental health.

- **Encouragement and support.**

Providing support in making new social connections or to access services designed to tackle loneliness or social isolation. For example, taking up a hobby or volunteering are positive ways to build social connections. Volunteering opportunities are posted online at: <https://doit.life/volunteer>

- **Frequent contact.**

Keeping in touch or arranging for members of the Lodge to keep in touch e.g. telephone, video conferencing or face to face.

Find out more

The following list is a small selection of the wide range of organisations which publish information on loneliness. *The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.*

- **Age UK**

Provides advice for older people on a range of subjects including loneliness. Age UK also provides details of local friendship groups.

www.ageuk.org.uk/

- **British Red Cross**
Offers a free confidential support line for advice on loneliness support.
0808 196 3651
www.redcross.org.uk/
- **Carers Trust**
Improves support, service, and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring for a loved one.
0300 772 9600
www.carers.org
- **Carers UK**
Gives expert advice, information, and support to carers.
0808 808 7777
www.carersuk.org
- **Independent Age**
Provides clear, free and impartial advice on a range of issues such as care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.
0800 319 6789
www.independentage.org
- **Reengage**
Offers opportunities for people aged 75 years and over to create new social connections.
0800 716543
www.reengage.org.uk
- **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**
Offers information, support and advice on sight loss, free telephone social groups.
www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/navigating-sight-loss/resources-for-mental-wellbeing/talk-and-support
- **Royal Voluntary Service**
Works with companies, charities and health boards across the UK to deliver programmes and activities that support individuals, communities and the NHS.
www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk
- **The Silver Line**
Operates a confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK, open every day and night of the year.
0800 4 70 80 90
www.thesilverline.org.uk

Other information

Masonic Charitable Foundation

The MCF provides grants and support for Freemasons and their family members. A wide range of help is available for daily living costs; health, care and wellbeing; and education-related costs for children and young people.

Call 0800 035 60 90 or visit www.mcf.org.uk

MCF Factsheets

You may also be interested in the following factsheets:

- **Bereavement**
- **Mental health**
- **Redundancy**

Scan the QR code below or visit mcf.org.uk/resources/almoner-resources



Whilst every care has been taken to verify accuracy, the information in this factsheet is for guidance only.

Last updated / reviewed: November 2023