

## Tips and Ideas to Help with Social Connection

Feeling lonely is a normal human emotion such as joy and sadness. Everyone feels lonely at times throughout their lives, and in a healthy way it's a sign of wanting to connect with people.

Here are 10 tips for what you can do and where you can go for support:

1. It's important not to blame yourself for feeling lonely; remember, often it's a reaction to not having the right quality of connections you need at a particular time.
2. Identify what's making you feel lonely: Figuring out what is making you feel lonely may help you find the right solutions to help you feel more connected. Reaching out to friends, family or neighbours and opening up about how you feel may help kickstart this process and get you on your way to feeling better.
3. Make the call – Reaching out can be daunting but those that haven't heard from you in quite some time will be happy to hear from you. Send a text or email to a friend or family member and invite them to meet or pick up the phone and call someone for a quick catch up while you are driving to work or the grocery store so there is a natural stopping point and it doesn't feel overwhelming.
4. Little things can make a difference- Having deep connections with close friends is important but brief exchanges with others can also have an impact on how you feel about yourself. Say hello to a neighbour, the shop keeper or person at the bus stop. Having good relations with those near you will make you feel more receptive to other, and possibly more, meaningful relationships
5. Join local groups and activities - Joining a local club or activity class can help you make new connections in your community. Use our interactive map to discover activities designed to support people experiencing loneliness in your local area. Or simply take the opportunity to follow up something you've always wanted to try; groups such as local choirs, running clubs or even craft evenings often cater for all levels of ability and welcome new members.
6. Volunteer - Giving your time to help others in need can be enormously rewarding. Not only can you help alleviate loneliness in the wider community, feeling useful and sharing skills are both powerful antidotes to loneliness.
7. Get outside -Going outside into nature and taking gentle exercise has been proven to lift the feeling of loneliness.
8. Connect online - Technology is a great way to both stay in touch with friends and make new friends. There are free courses offered in every libraries to help improve your skills in this area.
9. Start small - If you're feeling nervous about attending a group or club for the first time, ask a friend or family member if they will attend with you or ask the person running the activity if you can just watch at first. And, if joining a club feels too big, consider going somewhere where you can simply be around people and not be expected to talk to them such as a cafe, a park, the cinema or a sports event.
10. Focus on the good things in life - When you're feeling lonely you can sometimes get yourself in to a negative frame of mind. It can help to try and focus your thoughts on the good things in life. Remembering happy times such as a holiday and thinking about the good things in your life will help you to stay in a more positive place

## What can I do to help someone who might be lonely?

Many of us are already doing a great job of looking out for others, but there is still more we could all do to make our community healthier and happier. Sometimes all it takes is a small act. Whether it's popping to the shops, offering a lift or just saying hello - however big or small the task, everyone can look out for a neighbour nearby.

By doing your bit to support people in your neighbourhood, you'll help to rekindle neighbourly spirit and could help someone who is feeling lonely or isolated.

Someone nearby could need help but not feel comfortable or able to ask for it see below some tips on how to spot if someone might need some help

- You see them struggling with day-to-day tasks e.g. hanging out the washing.
- Their usual appearance has changed.
- Their curtains have stayed drawn for a couple of days or their post hasn't been collected in a while. It's probably nothing (they could just be having a lazy weekend) but if you're worried, give them a call or knock on their door to see if they're okay.
- They are not as chatty as usual.

## Helpful tips –

You could look out for your neighbours by...

- Taking letters to the post box.
- Helping someone fill in a form or use the computer.
- Offering a lift to a GP or hospital appointment.
- Taking a book back to the library.
- Chatting over the fence.
- Offering to walk someone's dog.
- Taking someone for a trip to a cafe or local community event.
- Organising a regular get together.
- 91% of us think that small moments of connection can make a difference to someone who is feeling lonely. It could be as simple as smiling at the person next to you, or starting a chat while waiting for the bus.

## How to be a conversation starter

Just like your first day at work or school, it's not always easy to find something to talk about with someone you don't know. Here are some ideas to get you started...

- Introduce yourself – it sounds obvious but it's something lots of people forget!
- Chat about the weather – come rain or shine, people love to talk about the weather as it's a great way of breaking the ice.
- Events in your area – is there anything going on nearby that your neighbour might be interested in?
- A common interest – do you share a hobby or interest with your neighbour that could spark a conversation?

## Staying Safe

Looking out for people in your neighbourhood is great, but it's important to stay safe and feel comfortable asking for or receiving help from others.

- Always make sure your neighbour knows who you are before you offer to help them and respect their privacy.
- Never let someone into your house unless you know who they are.

### Respect boundaries

Not everyone wants to chat. And that's ok.

If someone has their headphones on, or their phone out, it's usually a sign they don't want to be interrupted. They could be busy, or just simply not feel like chatting. And that has to be respected. But, that's also why the act of taking your headphones off, or putting your phone away is so powerful; it gives others the sign that you might be open to having a chat as well.