

# Loneliness

The experience of loneliness varies from person to person. Some people feel most lonely when physically alone, while others may feel lonely when surrounded by people, as they feel a lack of connection with those around them ... The experience of loneliness can also differ depending on the situation people find themselves in, for example: There are times when spending time alone can be restorative but then at other times these same experiences can bring a consuming sense of loneliness.

Feelings of loneliness are a normal part of the human experience, but at times can be confronting. Understanding how to address and ease feelings of loneliness is important. If you are feeling lonely a lot of the time, it's a good idea to reach out for help, as long-term or 'chronic loneliness', can affect your health, wellbeing and happiness.

## Feeling lonely? Try these tips

Tips for supporting yourself through loneliness:

### 1. RECOGNISE YOUR MOOD

Loneliness can feel like a lot of different emotions. Recognising how you are feeling is the first step to doing something to address these feelings. Start by investigating how you feel in your body, as emotions can appear first as physical responses, like tension in your muscles or difficulty sitting still. Sometimes writing things down can help you distinguish the bodily response from the emotion.

### 2. RECOGNISE WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY AND PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Once you recognise how you're feeling, it is easier to link these signals and emotions with our behaviour. Think about what leaves you feeling good and try to do something that makes you feel like this every day. People refer to this as self-care – doing a conscious action that supports your physical, mental, and emotional health. This looks different for everyone and it doesn't need to take much time or cost anything.

An example of self-care is to be conscious about the way you use social media. Remember that social media reflects only a portion of people's lives. It can be hard not to feel down when you compare yourself to these idealistic depictions. If you feel yourself slump after a social media session, think about stepping away and doing something else that leaves your cup full.

### 3. REACH OUT AND MAKE CONTACT

There are many ways to make contact with other people. If you are using social media, especially in times of physical distancing, making direct contact is usually more effective at combating loneliness than scrolling a feed. Social media apps, phone calls or in-person visits are all great ways to create connection. This might feel intimidating at first, but start small. A quick message to a friend or family member asking them how their week is going is a great way to get them talking.

### 4. RECOGNISE THAT RELATIONSHIPS ARE ALWAYS CHANGING

So that person didn't reply? Don't worry too much, keep reaching out. People are busy and each of us prefer different types of contact. Also, it's important to remember that relationships are always changing. Although this can seem scary, think of it as an opportunity. Go through your contacts and reach out to someone you haven't spoken to for a while.

### 5. JOIN IN THE NEIGHBOUR DAY CAMPAIGN

Connecting with lots of different kinds of people is shown to be an antidote to loneliness. One way to meet new people is to get involved in Relationships Australia's social connection campaign. Neighbour Day raises awareness about issues such as loneliness and supports people to make and sustain connections with the people around them. Have a look at our 'How To' page to get started.

### 6. REACH OUT TO SOMEONE ELSE YOU THINK MIGHT ALSO BE LONELY

Whether you're feeling lonely now or just know how it feels, you may get an emotional boost from befriending someone else who seems lonely, or needs a friend. It might feel awkward to make this connection, especially if you don't know them, but Neighbour Day is a great opportunity to reach out. Use one of our connections cards to give to a neighbour or someone in your community.

### 7. SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

If your feelings persist or increase, it's important to get professional help. Relationships Australia has a variety of services which can support you. For more information see 'Next Steps' section on the next page.

#### FOR 24/7 CRISIS SUPPORT

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

## Supporting someone else who is experiencing loneliness

Tips for supporting others through loneliness:

### 1. CONFIRM THEIR FEELINGS

Loneliness can feel like a variety of emotions. What you perceive as loneliness may be something else entirely for someone else. Try asking them about how they have been feeling recently. You might start by mentioning what made you reach out. It is important to remember that some people feel shame around disclosing feelings of loneliness. Even if they don't divulge at this time, show them that you are available. Keep in touch.

### 2. BE PREPARED

These conversations can be tough. Make sure you go in prepared. This includes making sure you are in a quiet and private location before asking difficult questions. You should also be ready to listen and, if needed, have done some research on services or opportunities that can address their situation (reading this was a good start!). If you commit to any plans, make sure you do not cancel, as this can exacerbate their feelings.

### 3. DO SOMETHING WITH THEM THAT THEY LOVE

Find out what they love doing and offer to do it with them. Feeling lonely can make everything feel overwhelming. Try to find something that you can do together that isn't too arduous. Some examples include a walk on the beach, bringing a pet over for a cuddle or cooking a meal together.

### 4. LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Caring for someone who is struggling can take a toll on you. It is important that while providing emotional and social support to someone else, you take time to check in with yourself. Practise self-care and seek support if it becomes overwhelming.

### 5. SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

If a person's feelings persist or increase, help them find professional help. Relationships Australia has a variety of services which can support you. For more information, see the 'Next Steps' section below.

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## Feeling lonely in your intimate relationship

Being in a romantic relationship doesn't make you immune from loneliness. If you are feeling lonely in your relationship, Relationships Australia Queensland wrote a blog with some useful tips for addressing this pain.

## About Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. For over 70 years, we have been supporting children, adults, families and communities. We have over 118 service locations across the country. We provide a broad range of services for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances. Relationships Australia receives funding from the Commonwealth Government, as well as from state and territory governments, and other sources.

#### NEXT STEPS

For more information on our services and how they can support you, or to find your nearest centre:

Call **1300 364 277**

Visit [www.relationships.org.au](http://www.relationships.org.au)