

Loneliness

Loneliness can and does affect everyone from time to time, but what is it? Loneliness has been defined in different ways. One definition is “A state of solitude or being alone”. But this does not fully describe the feeling of loneliness. A better description could be:

“The perception of being alone and isolated from others”

The “perception” explains that you may or may not actually be alone and that loneliness is a state of mind, more than a physical situation, although the two can be linked.

There are two common words which are often used in connection to loneliness but do mean different things:



Isolation: This is not an emotion but more of a physical circumstance of being alone. If you are Isolated, it does not automatically mean you will feel lonely. People which are Isolated and cut off from friends and family are more likely to experience loneliness. So, if you are aware of people in this situation it is important to check on them.

Solitude: This is often a healthy, personal discipline that allows you to engage in meaningful self-reflection by being alone. It is seen as a positive and can help with a person’s state of mind. Solitude can also help with loneliness, particularly social anxiety. In today’s busy lives with modern day technologies and social media, our lives and more importantly our minds can be occupied completely.

Continually going from one engaging activity to another. Such as working on a computer in the day, lunch break on social media, on the way home a podcast or YouTube video, then an evening in front of a TV. If you compare this to the historic past for 1000s of years, us humans had much more time for reflection. **Time in one’s own mind can be time well spent.**



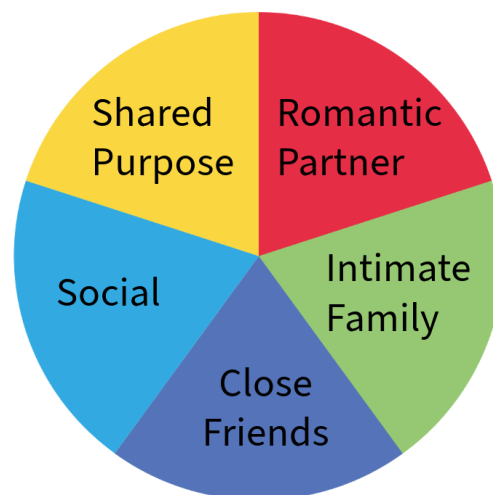
It is during this time that you can recognise and help resolve issues

locked away in your mind, or simply get to know your inner self. Learning and getting to know yourself is a huge step for people who can find it hard to make friends or relationships. **The first friend you need to make is yourself**, and solitude can help you do this.

Relationship Groups

If you are suffering with loneliness, it is important to recognise that there are several relationship groups that are important to have in your life. These are:

Relationship Groups



Partner / Romantic: Typically, a partner such as a wife / husband girlfriend or boyfriend but can also be a very close friend.

Intimate Family: These are the very closest people in your life, you know them completely and would typically be your family or very closest friends. (friends you consider family)

Close Friends: Your best friends. These are the very closest friends in your life. The people you can be completely your self with. Typically, a person may only have a small number of this type of relationship.

Social: These are people you enjoy spending time with, but you may not be able to completely relax and be yourself around.

Shared Purpose: This is typically a small to large group of people who you share a common purpose with such as work, Football Team, Church, Clubs and so on. You have things in common with these people and spending time with them is rewarding.

Everyone is different, but it is thought that if you have good relationships in all the above categories, then it is unlikely you will suffer with loneliness. Controversy you may have a great romantic relationship with your partner, but if your other categories are lacking then you could still feel lonely. There is no rule that everyone needs to have each relationship category in order not to feel lonely, but it can be useful to look at your own relationship groups and find areas that may need to be improved, especially if you do suffer with loneliness. This can also be important to understand for people who are feeling lonely but are in loving relationships already. It can be a mistake and even unfair to assume your partner is to blame for this. By highlighting any relationship groups lacking in your life could help understand your feelings of loneliness and direct you in the correct path to improve this.

Steps to improve loneliness

These are generally steps to take if you are feeling loneliness in your life.

- Establish what you are feeling, is it loneliness? Is it boredom? The two are often mixed up and are very similar.
- If loneliness is at fault, look at the relationship groups and establish which ones you would like to work on, also look at any which you feel you already have.
- Its important to take it slow and not suddenly force your friendship on people. The first step should be with you. Try some mindful solitude, get to know the inner you first.
- Feel your spare time with activities you can do alone. If you have hobbies and interests, you enjoy then concentrate more on these which will lower the feelings of loneliness.
- Start to say hi to people. Every day you will come into contact with people, from people serving you in shops, to people you walk past in the streets. By being more friendly and by talking with more people will boost your confidence, improve your mental wellness and also get you more used to engaging in conversations.
- When your ready to do so, take action! Here are some ideas.

1. Join a club to complement your activities / hobbies
2. Volunteer. There are loads of charities that need volunteers, this provides purpose, feels your time and gets you meeting people.

3. Get a pet, Pets are great company and can be an immediate remedy to loneliness, also walking a dog can be a way to see and talk to people each day. There is also Borrow my doggy, which is an app where you can take someone's dog for a walk if you do not have one of your own.
4. Exercise! There are great activities such as Rambling groups, sports teams or Parkrun, all will get you meeting people.
5. Rekindle old relationships. The reality is that it's much easier to reach out to old friends than making new ones. So, now's the time to do so. Don't expect to carry on where you left off, take it slowly but just to reach out and say hi is a great first step.
6. Befriending services can be used either to volunteer for or use. A great service and way to spend time with people.
7. Help others. You probably know of people who may be more lonely than yourself, elderly people or people isolated due to mobility or other circumstances. Reach out to these people to help them.
8. Talk! Use one of the many services out there such as psychotherapists or charities. Links below

Links:

befriending.co.uk

bacp.co.uk

www.mind.co.uk

www.samaritans.org

www.parkrun.co.uk

www.borrowmydoggy.com