



# LONELINESS & RE-CONNECTION

Information for Adults who Support Young People



Young people may particularly struggle to make sense of feelings of loneliness & how to overcome them

## WHAT IS LONELINESS?<sup>1</sup>

Loneliness is **normal**. Almost everyone will be affected by loneliness at some point in their life. We all have to learn how to manage it. Loneliness is:

- a whole mixture of painful feelings – in response to wanting more friends and/or closer friendships
- not just sadness. It can include all sorts of difficult emotions (anger, pain, frustration)
- not always about being on our own – we can be ‘Lonely in a crowd’. This means we can sometimes feel lonely when we are surrounded by people and those we care about.

There may be no obvious signs that a child is lonely

## LOCKDOWN AND LONELINESS

Young people have reported substantial increases in feelings of loneliness during the COVID-19 lockdown. **2,3**

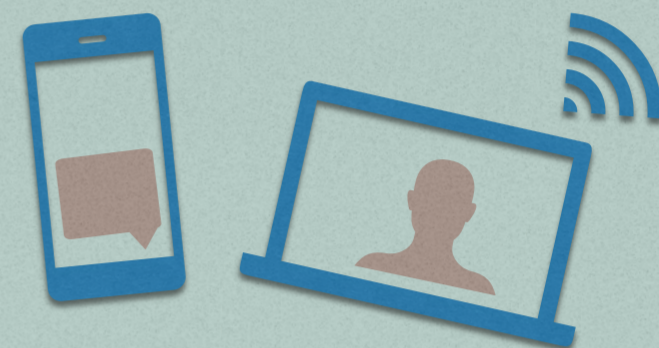
“Sometimes I have felt lonely due to not seeing my friends and being able to have normal conversations about day-to-day life.”

“I have felt incredibly lonely despite having what is honestly a great support system and being in the same household as one of my best friends.”



They worried:

- 1) About returning to “normal” social interactions.
- 2) That they would be less socially adept both in existing relationships *and* in creating new connections. **4,5**



Not all young people found it easy to use phones and technology to maintain their relationships during lockdown:

- It just wasn’t the same as being face-to-face;
- They missed being with people physically. **4,5**
- The lack of touch and proximity made some young people feel disconnected.

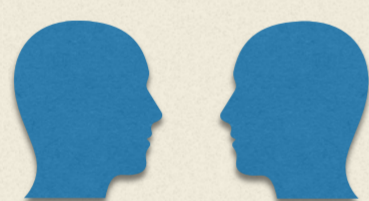
## GETTING ‘STUCK’ IN LONELINESS

Getting ‘stuck’ in loneliness is linked to mental health problems like anxiety and depression in young people. **6**

» Some will need extra support to make sure that they do not get stuck in lockdown loneliness.



## THINGS THAT MIGHT HELP



**Foster a climate of trust and connection**  
(school isn’t just about academic learning)

Make *space and time to communicate and connect*:

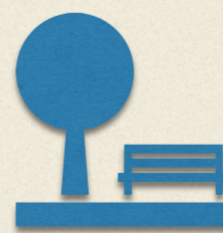
- ☐ Be honest – we’ve all been through challenging things recently.
- ☐ Celebrate that we’ve managed to pull through.
- ☐ Have regular check-ins with ourselves, each other and young people about how we feel and how we recognise how others feel.
- ☐ Help each other to feel included: “Every time they see a lonely person, they could greet him, and therefore he would feel a little better because he would see that others care about him and that others notice him, and I guess he won’t feel alone anymore.”<sup>7</sup>

**Talk about loneliness**



- ✓ Open up the space so it is ok for young people to say they are lonely – don’t dismiss or minimise loneliness.
- ✓ Explore what loneliness means and the forms it can take.

**Young people need space and time to (re-)build social skills** **8,9**



- ❖ (re-)learn to be together in each other’s presence.
- ❖ (re-)build dynamics with friends.



**Some young people who are struggling with loneliness may find it helpful to:** **10**

- Write their thoughts or concerns in a diary: “Sometimes I also write in a diary. My sister also has a diary and she writes her secrets in there and nobody is allowed to read that.”
- Reframing their mindset to think more positively; put things into perspective and help them to recognise the social connections they do have: “Try to change the world in your mind, just the whole picture in your mind of the world as everything is and maybe try to understand that you are not as lonely as you imagine.”

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 4. Demkowicz O, et al. Teenager’s Experiences of Life in Lockdown (TELL study). <https://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/education/research/impact/teenagers-experiences-of-life-in-lockdown/>  
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 9. Kall A, Shafran R, Lindegaard T, et al. A common elements approach to the development of a modular cognitive behavioral theory for chronic loneliness. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology.* 2020;88(3):269-282.  
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