

Understanding *Loneliness*



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What is loneliness?

Being lonely and being alone are different. Anyone can experience loneliness, even if they are surrounded by friends and family. Knowing the difference between them can help you better understand loneliness and how to help build meaningful connections.



If you want to talk to someone right now, Beyond Blue is available 24/7 either by phone or online counsellor chat. Visit **beyondblue.org.au** or call **1300 224 636**.

Loneliness

Loneliness is an uncomfortable feeling people get when they don't have the relationships they would like to have. Loneliness is about how disconnected you feel, not how many people you know.



Alone

Being alone is a physical state people are in when they have less interactions with others. Some people may enjoy being alone, but for others it can lead to loneliness.



Social isolation

A lack of social contact with others that can include less frequent interactions with other people or having fewer people to interact with.



Meaningful relationships

Meaningful relationships happen when people are connected to others in a way that is important to them. Meaningful relationships are made through shared values, repeated interactions and effort over time.



Things to know about loneliness



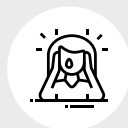
Anyone can feel lonely

Loneliness can affect anyone – friends, partners, parents, children, colleagues and neighbours.

Life changes such as changing job or school, losing a loved one, moving to a new place, relationship breakdowns, or becoming a parent can make someone more vulnerable to loneliness.

Personal circumstances can also influence how lonely someone feels, such as low income, lack of transport or living with a disability.

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Feeling lonely is different to being alone

Loneliness is a feeling whereas being alone is a physical state. You can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. You can be alone and not feel lonely.



Humans are social beings

The level of connection each person craves may be different, but connection is part of being human. People thrive when they feel heard, seen and understood.



Loneliness is a cue

Like hunger is a cue to eat, loneliness is a cue to connect with people. Don't ignore it.



Meaningful relationships take time

Meaningful relationships can reduce the risk of loneliness. These relationships are made through repeated interactions and effort over time.



Loneliness can be harmful

Loneliness that lasts can be harmful to health and wellbeing, increasing risk of heart conditions, mental illness and dementia.



Loneliness doesn't have to last

Whether you are feeling lonely, or know someone who is, there are things that you can do. Scan for more information and resources on loneliness.



Signs of loneliness

Everyone's experience with loneliness is different, but there are some signs you can look out for in yourself and those around you.

What you might hear

Here are some examples of what someone might say when they're feeling lonely.

People express themselves differently and their words might not be an exact match, but being open to listening is a great place to start.

- ▶ No one understands me
- ▶ I don't have anyone to turn to
- ▶ There is nobody I can talk to
- ▶ I can't just be myself
- ▶ I don't fit in/feel accepted/belong
- ▶ I feel lost/empty
- ▶ No one has my back
- ▶ Why don't people like me?
- ▶ What's wrong with me?
- ▶ People can't be trusted
- ▶ I think I am too different

What you might see

Don't assume that someone is or isn't lonely based on who is around them.

Take the time to really see them and look out for some of these signs.

- ▶ Avoiding or withdrawing from others to prevent rejection.
- ▶ 'Soft' request to connect as to not burden others.
For example 'I would love to catch up but no pressure at all, I don't want to put you out'.
- ▶ Poor eye contact and/or withdrawn body language.
- ▶ Less engaged in conversations.

Connecting with yourself and others to reduce loneliness

Loneliness doesn't have to last forever, but it might take time to feel more fulfilled by your connections and relationships.

Here are some things you can do if you are feeling lonely.

Remember you are not alone

Most people will feel lonely at some point in life. It is our signal to connect with others and develop meaningful connections.

Expect change

It's natural for relationships to change over time. Knowing this can help you to better adjust as your relationships change and evolve.

Forget comparison

Comparison can often make us feel inferior to others. Try not to focus on what you lack, rather try and focus on and develop the things you have.

Meaningful relationships take time

Don't be discouraged if it takes a while to find people you connect with. We can't like and connect with everyone we meet. It will take time to find your people.

Get outside

Spending time outside can help develop a sense of connectedness to the natural world and contribute to improved wellbeing. It can also be a great way to meet new people. Why not visit a local park, beach or regional park?



Scan to find
an open space
near you.





Find things that bring you joy

One of the best ways to meet likeminded people is through shared interests. You could start a hobby, join a cause or help revitalise a local area.

Find groups and activities in your area by visiting rockingham.wa.gov.au

Small talk is important

While small talk may seem insignificant, it opens the door to a connection. Ask follow-up questions to help get to know someone better. The more you practice the better you will get.

Get active

Being active is good for physical and mental health, but it's also a great way to meet new people. Go on regular walks, try some outdoor gym equipment or participate in a social sport. The City has a range of facilities and programs that might be a good place to start.



Scan for
active living
information.

Try volunteering

A sense of purpose can help people feel better about themselves.

When we think more positively it can make us more open to new connections. Want to volunteer?



Scan to find
out more about
volunteering.

Nurture current relationships

If you are feeling lonely you don't always have to make a new friend to feel less lonely. You might be able to strengthen an existing relationship. Make time to check in and see people you know.

Non-human connections

Animals can help you feel connected, cared for and lead to increased social interactions. If you don't have a pet of your own, try visiting a local park or ask a neighbour if you can walk their dog.

Building Meaningful Relationships

Meaningful relationships can help grow feelings of happiness, a sense of security and belonging.

What is a meaningful relationship?

Meaningful relationships can mean and look different to different people, but generally they involve:

- › Feeling joy and excitement with someone
- › Being able to be yourself around someone
- › Taking time for and having interest in the other person and feeling they do the same for you
- › Open communication
- › A sense of trust and respect with someone
- › Sharing similar values with someone

If you need support with relationships in your life contact Relationships Australia on **1300 364 277** or visit **relationships.org.au**





How to build meaningful relationships



Be yourself

Meaningful relationships are built on trust and honesty, so being your authentic self is crucial. Try not to be who you think they want you to be. You don't have to agree on everything or share all the same interests to build meaningful relationships. Sometimes it's our differences that make our relationships with others exciting and meaningful.



Communicate

Exchanging thoughts, feelings and ideas with people around us can help build meaningful relationships. Listen to and understand what other people are saying. Don't listen just to respond. The more you practice, the better you will get.



Be fair

Meaningful relationships need to be fair in meeting both people's needs and expectations. This means there needs to be give and take and consideration for each other. A healthy relationship should have commitment and a willingness to be accommodating to each other's needs.



Make time

Spending quality time with people around you provides a space for meaningful relationships to develop, mature and strengthen. It doesn't really matter what you spend quality time doing, as long as the people involved are committed to giving one another undivided attention.



Nurture Current Relationships

You don't have to make new friends to feel less lonely. You can form bonds within existing relationships. Make time to check in and see people you know. Reflect on the relationships that work best in your life, what qualities do these relationships have and how can you bring these qualities into other relationships.

Loneliness: How you can help

If someone is feeling lonely they might not want to talk about it. Here are some things you can do.



Learn about loneliness, to help yourself and others.



Start an open, non-judgemental conversation with someone you are concerned about.



Don't make assumptions about what someone is feeling or the reason they might be feeling it.



Include people you might be concerned about, invite them to do things with you. They might not always say yes, but having options and knowing people care can help them feel included.



Suggest something new to try. Their interests might have changed so help them find something they might be interested in.



Don't take it personally if someone you know feels lonely; it doesn't mean they don't like you. The type of connections people want or need can change over time.



If you're worried it might be something else, there are resources available to help at **beyondblue.org.au**

This guide contains general information. Everyone's experiences are different and things that have worked for yourself or others might not be described in this content. That does not reduce their importance. Listen to yourself and acknowledge what works for you.



