Loneliness during COVID-19

> **"You can have everything in the world and still be the loneliest man. And that is the most bitter type of loneliness."**
> **- Freddie Mercury, musician**

> **"The most terrible poverty is loneliness."**
> **- Mother Teresa, saint & missionary**

> **"We human beings are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others."**
> **- Dalai Lama XIV, current Dalai Lama**

Loneliness is a complex emotional response to a lack of connection or companionship with others. Everybody feels lonely at times but persistent loneliness can lead to further problems.

Unfortunately, due to the spread of COVID-19, many countries have implemented lockdown measures and social distancing rules in order to combat the spread of the virus. Naturally, this has led to a rise in feelings of loneliness. Not only may you be separated from your loved ones but also there are many day-to-day social interactions we are missing. All of these interactions, no matter how big or small, contribute to our sense of connection. Without them we may begin to feel isolated, physically and mentally. Although restrictions may be lifting, and we may able to see our loved ones to some degree, we can still feel lonely as we still have to adhere to social distancing rules. Furthermore, some of our community has to continue to isolate if they are at a higher risk than the general population.

If you are affected by loneliness and would like further support, you can speak with one of our trained therapists on our Adviceline.

Want to know more?

Get in touch with CiC using the details below:
Phone: 0800 085 1376 or +44 (0)20 7938 0963
Email: assist@cicwellbeing.com
Text relay: 1800 0800 085 1376
Live Chat: www.well-online.co.uk

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Loneliness levels during COVID-19

The Mental Health Foundation conducted a longitude study that looked into the effects Coronavirus has had on mental health. The respondents were 2,221 UK adults aged 18 and over. Almost one quarter of respondents (24%) reported having felt loneliness because of COVID-19, this number almost doubled (44%) in respondents aged 18-24 years. 35% of adults aged 25-23 reported having felt loneliness as a result of COVID-19. One in six people aged over 55 said they have felt lonely due to COVID-19.

Dr Antonis Kousoulis, Director at the Mental Health Foundation has said the following on these findings: "Our data reveal that millions of people in the UK are experiencing feelings of loneliness - which is a key risk factor for developing or worsening mental health problems.

"The concern is that the longer the pandemic goes on, the more feelings become long-term. The impact of long-term loneliness on mental health can be very hard to manage."

"While the initial priority must be to prevent loss of life, we fear that we may be living with the mental health impacts of the Coronavirus situation for many years to come. This is especially true of vulnerable groups and it is critical that governments and others are mindful of this in developing policy as we go forward."

Whilst many of the effects COVID-19 is having on mental health are likely to linger for some time, there are still some steps we can take to try to combat and lessen them in the here and now.

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Steps to reduce loneliness

▶ **Admit you are lonely**. One of the first things you can do is to recognise that you are lonely. Once you have acknowledged this you can try to understand it and begin the process of figuring out how to address it.

▶ **Keep up communication**. Although our contact may be low, our communication doesn't need to be. We can still talk to our loved ones as frequently as we need, via telephone, email, video calls, online games and letters. It may be a good idea to set up a regular chat with a loved one, we all have different, conflicting schedules and things can be hectic. Setting up a dedicated time ensures that both parties have some free time to take the time to connect. This will also give you something to look forward to during any low periods. This can be as frequently/ infrequently as needed or possible - 10 minutes a day or an hour a week. Whatever works best for both of you.

▶ **Visit loved ones**. If you are able to do so, remember that you are now able to visit one household in their garden if you maintain distancing, you can also meet them in parks - again with distancing. If you live close enough to members of your social network to visit them and it is safe for you to do, make sure to arrange some time together. You could simply go for a walk through the park, take some exercise together, or even just meet up and plan to read a book independently - the simple fact that you have someone with you will make you feel great.

▶ **Do things that make you feel connected to your loved ones**. Even if we cannot physically talk to or visit our loved ones, there are other things we can do to feel connected to them. This might be going over photos from a previous holiday together, listening to some of their favourite music, learning a hobby that they enjoy, or cooking their favourite recipe.

▶ **Participate in virtual group activities**. There are many group activities that you can take part in during lockdown that can help you to feel connected and ease feelings of loneliness. Such as: book clubs, exercise classes, gaming, following a recipe together, watching the same movie one night, sign up to an online wine or cocktail tasting, take an online class together, listen to a podcast or audiobook together.

▶ **Reach out to others feeling lonely**. Remember that many others are also feeling lonely during this difficult time. Connecting with each other would help both people and you may make a new friend! There are many organisations that connect you with others to combat loneliness. The Advocacy Focus have started a new project, Pen-demic Pals and Campaign to End Loneliness have been running projects to fight loneliness in older age but you can contribute to campaign despite your age. See 'Further Resources' for links to these campaigns.

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Let people know. Be willing to open up and be vulnerable with people. Loneliness results in feelings of isolation; if you are able to share more of what you feel, your memories, aspirations and experiences the more you are going to feel understood. Letting your close ones know how you are feeling not only helps them to understand how you are feeling, but it will also encourage them to help you with these feelings. You may find that once a loved one knows you are feeling lonely, they will make more effort and time to check in on you.

Remember this is temporary. One thing you can do to combat loneliness that you may be feeling because of COVID-19 is try to step back and remember that the current social restrictions are temporary. Although it may seem far off, and the current situation is difficult, at some point we will be able to return to our workplace, our schools, places that we go for social interaction. It may help you keep up to date with how the Government are easing restrictions on these things. As you see them slowly lift, this may help you to combat your loneliness.

Get support. If your loneliness is beginning to negatively affect you and feel you need some assistance, reach out for support. The CiC 24/7 AdviceLine is a great place to start. We can provide you with in the moment support or looking into counselling for you to address this issue. Even if you do not feel that you need counselling to solve the issue, making contact with our team and having a chat with our AdviceLine can be hugely beneficial.

Further resources

Advocacy Focus Pen-demic Pals: <https://www.advocacyfocus.org.uk/pen-demic-pals>

Campaign to End Loneliness: <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/>

NHS Advice on Loneliness: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/feeling-lonely/>

Mind on Loneliness: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/ loneliness/about-loneliness/>