

LONELINESS

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, not having a voice, and not belonging. Even those who are surrounded by people in a room can feel lonely and the effects can be long-lasting. The latest figures demonstrate that 7%, approximately 3.1 million adults in England feel lonely always or often. (ONS.gov.UK 25). Loneliness has significant health effects and, at its most severe, can lead to increased hospital admission rates, heart ill-health and increased risk of health conditions such as cancer.

How can loneliness affect wellbeing?

Loneliness can have a significant impact on overall wellbeing, affecting mental, physical, social, and workplace health. It is strongly linked to increased risk of mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, low mood, and reduced self-esteem, while also contributing to stress and emotional distress.

Physically, loneliness is associated with poorer health outcomes, including cardiovascular issues, weakened immunity, poor sleep, and a higher risk of early mortality. From a social perspective, it can lead to feelings of disconnection, reduced confidence, and withdrawal from relationships, making it harder to build or maintain meaningful connections. In the workplace, loneliness can reduce motivation, productivity, and engagement, while increasing absenteeism and weakening team relationships. If left unaddressed, loneliness can become chronic, creating a cycle of isolation and declining wellbeing that significantly impacts overall quality of life.

Signs of loneliness

Emotionally people can feel:

- ❖ Sad, low, empty, or disconnected from others
- ❖ Feeling unwanted, misunderstood, or left out
- ❖ Having a lack of confidence
- ❖ Increased anxiety

Behaviourally it can lead to:

- ❖ Withdrawing from social situations
- ❖ Avoiding communication
- ❖ Spending more time alone or online
- ❖ Losing interest in hobbies or activities they once enjoyed

Socially people can:

- ❖ Struggle to form or maintain meaningful relationships
- ❖ Experience a lack of belonging
- ❖ Feel lonely even when surrounded by others

Physically it can cause:

- ❖ Low energy
- ❖ Changes in sleep or appetite
- ❖ Increased reliance on distractions such as social media or television



How can you manage loneliness?

There are many things that you can do to improve and manage loneliness. Examples are:

Building and maintaining connections - reach out to friends, family, or colleagues and check-in, prioritise the quality of a relationship rather than quantity, and join clubs or groups with people that have similar interests.

Start small - take small and manageable steps, a simple message or short conversation can go a long way, and set realistic goals for yourself to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Create structure and routine - try to plan regular activities in the week, attend recurring events to build confidence, and try to create a routine to reduce isolation and improve general mood.

Ask for support - it's ok to need support. Find someone you trust to talk to about your feelings, access external support through work, and consider thinking about professional help from your GP or a counsellor if needed.



Improving loneliness in the workplace

The workplace can feel overwhelming but it's a good way to build connections and create relationships. Encouraging meaningful interactions through regular team check-ins, informal conversations, and peer support systems such as buddy schemes, particularly for new starters, are all easy ways to build connection.

Managers play a key role by holding regular one-to-ones, recognising signs of loneliness, and creating a psychologically safe environment where people feel comfortable sharing how they feel.

Building an inclusive workplace is also essential, ensuring that all employees especially those working remotely or in hybrid roles feel valued and able to participate fully. Organisations can further support connection by offering a range of formal and informal opportunities to engage, such as team activities, networks, and cross-team collaboration. Listening to employee feedback through surveys or focus groups and taking clear action helps ensure initiatives are relevant and effective.

Alongside this, providing access to wellbeing resources, such as mental health support and training, and promoting a healthy work-life balance can help address loneliness more holistically and sustainably.

