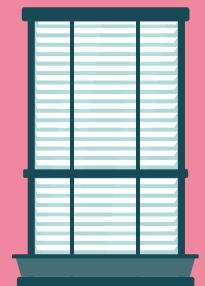
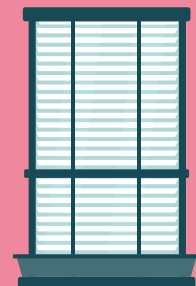
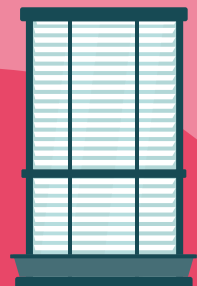
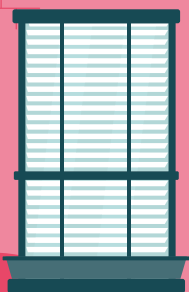


# Kooth's guide to understanding and managing feelings of loneliness



## Kooth's Accreditation

Kooth offers a fully accredited service with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). All counsellors receive regular clinical supervision in accordance with BACP guidelines.

We work in tandem with the NHS to provide free, safe and anonymous mental health support. And as a trusted delivery partner of the NHS we are able to deliver mental health and wellbeing support to children and young people whenever they need it.





## Understanding Loneliness

Nearly all of us will have felt loneliness at some point in our lives. In the past few years especially, more and more people are reporting feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The cause of loneliness varies from person to person, and how it is experienced is unique to each individual.


Some of us feel lonely if we don't have regular contact with people, or we don't have a big circle of friends. Some of us can be surrounded by people, but can't seem to connect with them or feel ourselves.

These are different situations, but they can both trigger feelings of loneliness.

Whilst loneliness is often described as a lack of social contact; it can also represent a deeper emotional disconnect from the world and people around you. It might make you feel:

- Like nobody understands you
- Lost
- Empty
- Sad
- Nervous
- Like you don't have any meaningful connections, even when you socialise

Experiencing thoughts and feelings like this can make it difficult to connect properly or form connections with others, which can then increase loneliness.



## Causes of Loneliness

The cause of loneliness will be different for everyone. Sometimes there is a clear contributing factor to loneliness, and, other times, we may not understand why we are feeling lonely.

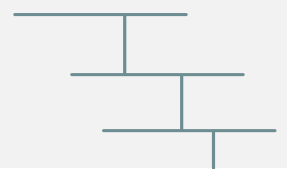
For some people, external factors or circumstances may mean they feel lonely. For example:

- Moving to a new place
- Friendship break up
- Experiencing a loss
- Starting a new school
- Big holidays and celebrations
- Living in a rural area
- Experiencing discrimination for any reason, such as race, gender, sexual, or disability



There can also be more internal factors, such as mental health conditions, that can lead to feelings of loneliness. Why is this?

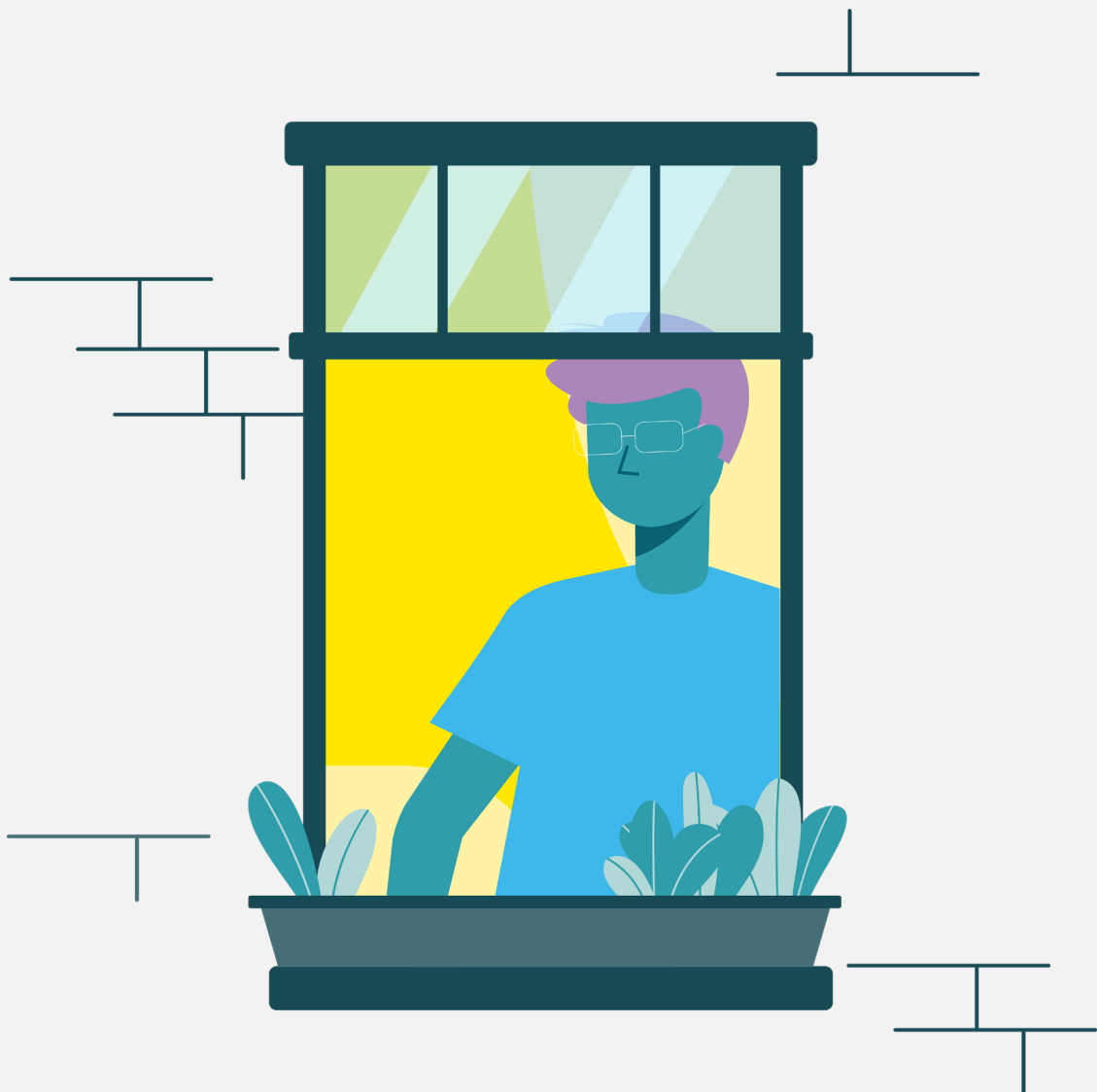
- Some people may find it hard to talk about their mental health problems due to misconceptions and stigma surrounding mental health. This can lead to people feeling isolated and unable to reach out for support.
- Some mental health problems can cause low self-esteem and confidence, which may stop people from socialising with others.
- Some mental health problems such as social anxiety make connecting with others really difficult.

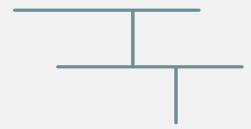


## The Impact of Loneliness

- **Mental health:** Similar to how mental health difficulties can lead to feeling lonely, loneliness can also increase the risk of developing mental health problems such as depression.
- **Physical health:** Research shows loneliness can impact some areas of physical health, including the immune system and sleep quality.

Loneliness can often make approaching the “real world” feel very difficult. Even when we have people around us for support, the deeper disconnection we feel to everyone and everything can make it really difficult to reach out for support.





## Tips for Handling Loneliness

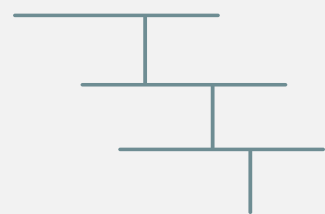
Everyone's experience of loneliness is subjective, and how to combat feeling lonely will also be unique to each individual. Here are some ideas you could try:

### **Practise Gratitude**

Gratitude can help us feel more connected to the positive things in our life. This can sometimes help with the feelings of emptiness that often come with being lonely.

To get started with practising gratitude, try:

- Keeping a gratitude journal: write down 2-3 things everyday that you are thankful for
- Show your appreciation to others: tell or do something nice for someone, or thank them for something. This could be anyone- a friend, family member, or even a pet!
- Fill up a gratitude jar by putting in small notes (or objects) each day for things you are grateful for



## Be mindful of making comparisons

Comparing yourself to others is a very natural thing to do, and it's hard to avoid.

Whether it's watching other people in everyday life, over social media, or in the news, it may often feel like you are the only one who is feeling lonely, and this will only increase feelings of isolation.

Try to use social media mindfully, by limiting time spent online and by following people who are positive inspirations. It's also good to keep in mind that people often share the parts of their life they want to be seen, and we don't know the full story.

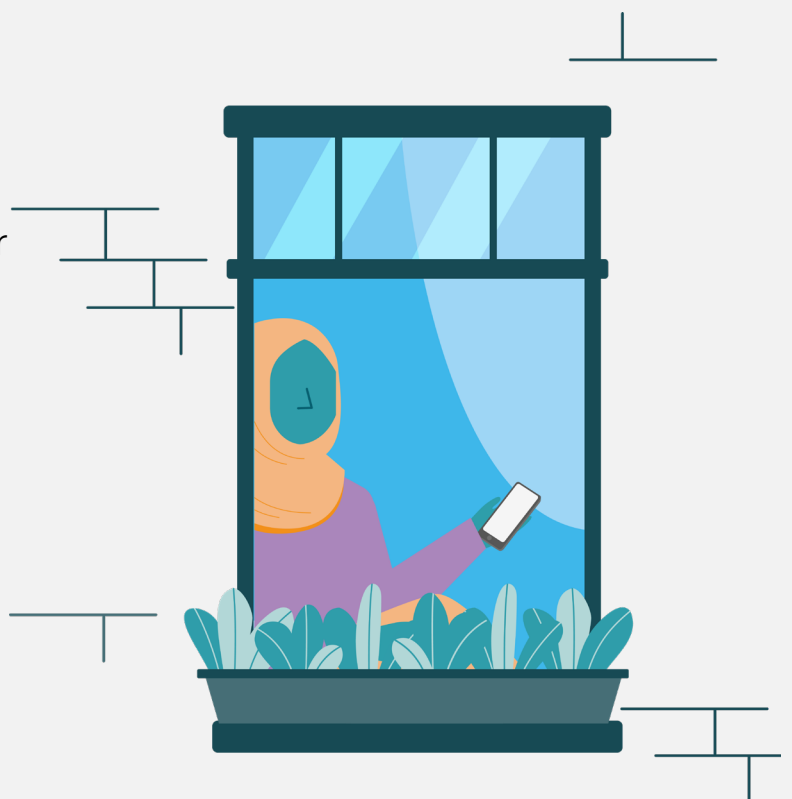
## Start Something New

Starting a new hobby can be a way to distract your mind from feelings of loneliness and also make some more social connections.

- Find a club based on your interests
- Volunteer in the local community
- Learn a new skill

It might be helpful to break down any longer term goals like the ones above into smaller goals to give you time to progress at your own pace.

For instance, if you want to volunteer in the local community but that feels too overwhelming at the moment, start by setting yourself a goal to research local organisations you're interested in.



## **Reach Out to Others**

If you are able to, talking to others about how you are feeling can really help you work through some of your emotions. We all feel lonely at times, and you might find that others can share similar experiences, give advice, and provide a listening ear.

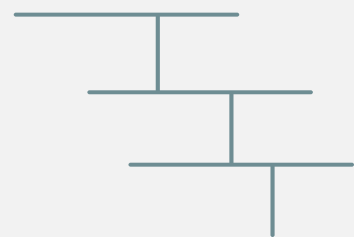
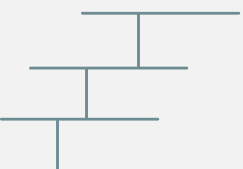
You might not feel like reaching out to friends or family, and that's okay. At Kooth, a free, safe, and anonymous mental health digital platform, we have discussion boards where you can connect with other users. Talking to people who have been through similar experiences can help you feel like you're not alone.

Talking to others (about your feelings or just in general) might seem like an impossible task. However, listening to others can be just as beneficial. We might not have much to say, but listening to someone else can be a great way to keep in touch with our loved ones and to make us feel part of a social network.

## **Finally, Be Patient with Yourself**

You may have felt lonely for a really long time, and some of these steps might seem daunting. Take it slow and be gentle with yourself.

If you find that you are struggling with feelings of loneliness, reach out to our wonderful team at Kooth. Just click the chat or message buttons and we will get to you as soon as one of our practitioners is available.





## Accessing Support from Kooth

It's quick and easy to sign up to Kooth and will only take a few minutes. No formal referral from a GP is needed and you can self refer at anytime.

You can access a range of support options including:

- Goal setting and journalling
- Mini activity hub
- Chat with a member of our team (\*live chat or send us a message anytime)
- Community support (discussion boards and live forums)
- Helpful articles (from the Kooth team and our community)

You can live chat with a member of our team between:

- 12pm-10pm on weekdays
- 6pm - 10pm on weekends

