NHS
Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Loneliness and Isolation

Overview

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

- What do we mean by loneliness and isolation?
- What can cause people to become socially isolated?
- The effects of loneliness and isolation on mental health
- How can we address loneliness and isolation?
- Resources and supports
- Looking after yourself

NHS
Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Loneliness and Isolation Quiz

True or false statements
(Please circle)

1.	Loneliness can affect people at any age	**True/False**
2.	Loneliness is a mental health problem	**True/False**
3.	Lonely people are more likely to visit their GP and other health/social care services	**True/False**
4.	Loneliness can have a negative impact on your health	**True/False**
5.	Loneliness and isolation are the same	**True/False**

1.	**Loneliness can affect people at any age**	**True** Loneliness can affect people at any age, but we often think of loneliness as only affecting the elderly population. Research carried out by NSPCC highlighted that over 5,000 children contacted Childline about loneliness, sadness, and isolation as their main problem (April 2008- March 2009).
2.	**Loneliness is a mental health problem**	**False** Feeling lonely isn't in itself a mental health problem but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem increases your chance of feeling lonely and feeling lonely can have a negative impact on your mental health.
3.	**Lonely people are more likely to visit their GP and other health/ social care service**	**True** Reports highlight that older people often present to their GP's/or other services because they have no-one else for company.
4.	**Loneliness can have a negative impact on your health**	**True** Some research has found that loneliness can increase the risk of heart disease and links between loneliness and dementia rates.
5.	**Loneliness and isolation are the same**	**False** You don't have to be socially isolated to be lonely.

NHS
Greater Glasgow and Clyde

- It is possible for an individual to be socially isolated without feeling lonely, likewise is it possible for an individual to feel lonely without being socially isolated

We all feel lonely from time to time. Feelings of loneliness are personal, so everyone's experience of loneliness will be different.

One common description of loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. But loneliness is not always the same as being alone.

You may choose to be alone and live happily without much contact with other people, while others may find this a lonely experience.

Or you may have lots of social contact, or be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely – especially if you don't feel understood or cared for by the people around you

mind

for better mental health

Activity 1: Signs of loneliness

Activity 2: Causes of loneliness

Activity 3: Impact of loneliness

Activity 4: The role of social media

Signs of Loneliness

- **Someone experiencing loneliness might display one of more of these:**
- they spend a lot of time alone
- they can be unproductive- as doing things can often seem like too much and a lot of effort
- they can get stuck and fixated on the negatives
- they feel very tired all the time – burnout
- they may cancel plans right before they were meant to happen
- they may seem quite quiet and distant when you are with them

Signs of Loneliness

- Everyone is different in terms of how sociable they are and how often they like to be with others. And it’s not always easy to spot clear signs of loneliness of isolation. Some things to look for might include:
- low self-esteem and losing confidence in themselves and their abilities
- being sad
- withdrawing and pulling away from others
- getting angry or upset
- a noticeable change in their behaviour
- not wanting to engage with hobbies or social activities
- drinking or smoking

What can cause people to become isolated?

- **Loneliness has many different causes, which vary from person to person. We don't always understand what it is about an experience that makes us feel lonely.**

- **COVID?**
- **Where we live?**
- **School?**
- **Social Media?**

Causes of loneliness/isolation

- Different factors, situations and circumstances can cause loneliness and isolation, including:
- feeling misunderstood or having a sense of not ‘fitting in’, even if they have family and friends around them
- comparing their abilities to others, for example not being picked for a sports team or doing badly in their exams
- experiencing a change to their mental health or wellbeing, or managing a mental health condition
- being bullied
- living with a long-term health condition or disability
- times of change such as moving schools, going from primary to secondary school, or moving from college to university

Loneliness – the big picture

- The ONS in 2018 found that 9.8% of 16 – 24 year olds said that they were “often lonely”
- The ONS found that 11.3% of 10 – 15 year olds said that they were “often lonely”
- The Loneliness Experiment conducted by the BBC found that 40% of 16 – 24 year-olds said they feel lonely *often* or *very often*
- The Our Coronavirus: Mental Health in the Pandemic series by the Mental Health Foundation found that 38% of those in the 18-24 age range experienced loneliness in the past two weeks

The impact of loneliness

Research by the Mental Health Foundation found in 2018 found that more than half of 18-24 year olds experience depression when they feel lonely, with 42% saying it leads to anxiety. 67% say their mental health worsens as a result of feeling lonely.

The research also found that the stigma of loneliness remains the greatest barrier to getting help. With 46% saying they would be too embarrassed to talk about it and 52% feel they ought to cope with the problem themselves.

Loneliness can contribute to stress, anxiety, depression, paranoia and cognitive decline – and it can be both a cause and effect of other mental health problems.

Social Media

Research by the MHF found that 30% of 18-24 year olds say social media is driving them to feel socially isolated .

Research by the charity found 82% of young people say that spending time face-to-face with others improves their mental health.

In contrast, 30% say that technology, such as social media, is causing them to feel lonely as it has replaced face-to-face contact.

However, it’s also important to recognise the benefits of social media, particularly during the pandemic when many people used social media to stay connected to others, seek positive feedback and find support.

Social Media

Children and young people are growing up in a different world compared to the one their parents grew up in. In particular, screen-based activities play a big part in our children's lives. This might include watching TV, gaming, or using social media to connect with friends.

It's been estimated that screen time can take up between 2 to 8 hours a day of young people's time. The internet has a big influence over how our children interact with others and experience the world.

And while there are positives to connecting with others online, there are also worries about the impact this can have on their mental wellbeing. One of the biggest issues is young people comparing themselves to others, which can lead to feelings of isolation.

What to say to someone…

- Validate their feelings
- Ask them a question that gets them thinking about why they may feel this way and what they can do to change it
- Use the 2 A's – affirm and ask. Affirm them by saying '*I'm here for you*' and ask them a question to see what you can do to help
- Encourage them to reach out when they're feeling down, that might be to you, another friend, a family member, a trusted adult or a support service (take a look at the #AyeFeel page for a range of organisations that are there to support young people)
- Make plans with them to do something fun with them that both of you enjoy to just get their mind off it for a while

More advice…

- If you think your teen is lonely or they've told you they feel this way, it might help to let them know that they aren't alone in experiencing this. Below are some tips for your teenager to help them cope with and deal with loneliness.
- Distract yourself with activities and hobbies you enjoy.
- See if you can think of something positive in your life.
- Think about what's making you feel lonely and if there is something you can do that might help you feel better.
- If you feel able to, join a social club, music or drama group, or a sports team.
- Be easy on yourself and wait for the feeling to pass.
- Remember that what you see on social media isn't always the truth. It might look like others are having a better time than you.
- If you're feeling lonely and isolated don't be afraid to tell friends or family. Speak to someone you trust or call a support line.

Things not to say !

- Just go out and meet people!
- Have more confidence!
- Why don’t you join some meet-up group or do things you love?
- You just think that you’re alone, but you aren’t.

Small things you can do

- Invite them along to planned events with friends/family.
- Ask them if they want to come with you to run an errand. You can chat as you both grocery shop or take someone to their appointments
- Eat together at meal times.
- Chill in front of the TV together.
- Send a text to check in and let them know you are thinking of them.

BUPA - A Parent's Guide

https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/teenager-loneliness

Further information and support

- Sources of support
- Childline: www.childline.org.uk
- Action for Children: www.actionforchildren.org.uk
- Young Minds: youngminds.org.uk
- Mind: www.mind.org.uk
- Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/unlock-loneliness/15-things-do-if-youre-feeling-lonely

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/mhf-15-loneliness-tips-for-young-people.pdf

https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/gc/hillheadhigh/parent-zone/advice-and-support/mental-health/