



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

Loneliness

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Loneliness and being alone are two completely different things. It is important to have some time alone, it can be very beneficial to you and give you the time and space to think and process things. Loneliness is something we all feel from time to time, and these feelings are personal meaning everyone's experience of loneliness will be unique and you don't have to be alone to feel lonely either.

Loneliness is not a mental health problem but the two are closely linked and can sometimes cause an unhelpful cycle. Mental health issues can make someone feel lonely and feeling lonely can be damaging to mental health. Experiencing loneliness on a regular basis can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress. For those with social anxiety, they may isolate themselves from situations which consequently leads them to feeling lonely. The stigma around mental illness and the misconceptions that can come with that can lead to people avoiding talking to anyone about what they are going through and lead to loneliness.



There can be varying causes of loneliness and circumstances that can increase an individual's risk of becoming lonely, either way, feeling lonely isn't a pleasant experience. Loneliness has been a problem for many years and the pandemic seemed to highlight it further as many became isolated through restrictions, lockdowns, and self-isolation guidelines.

Other causes of loneliness can be:

- Experiencing a bereavement
- Moving to a new area and not knowing anyone
- Retiring
- Starting university
- The breakup of a marriage or relationship
- Changing jobs

While some of these are understandably difficult situations such as a breakup or bereavement, others are commonly seen as being positive and exciting. This can often mean that if that individual is experiencing loneliness, people don't suspect it meaning it can go unnoticed and potentially worsen, going on to cause mental health problems. A common example of this is starting university, something that is known as being fun and exciting, a taste of independence, parties, new people and a step closer to a career.





For many, their circumstances can cause loneliness, these can be difficult to manage and leave people feeling very trapped. Circumstances include:

- Being a single parent
- Estranged from family
- Being part of a minority group
- Being a carer for someone
- Having a disability
- Being a victim of sexual or physical abuse and finding it difficult to connect with others.

If the awareness of the causes and circumstances associated with loneliness was raised and people had a wider understanding, this could improve loneliness and potentially even see it reduce. Having the knowledge can allow you to be more conscious of what something could be experiencing and lead to being able to start a conversation to check in with someone if you are concerned, they have become lonely or are vulnerable to becoming lonely. You asking them could be the first step for them to make changes to relieve the loneliness, form connections with others and take control before it becomes a bigger problem.

Perhaps this will also offer you a chance to look at your own situation, have you found yourself feeling lonely? How can you work to relieve this, so your mental health doesn't become at risk? Is there anyone close you feel comfortable talking to or are you aware of why you are feeling lonely? The main point is, loneliness doesn't have to last forever, you can take action and improve yourself and your life, enabling connection and enjoyment. Counselling can be a great way to work on this, with the help of a registered professional, you can escape loneliness and live life in a way that feels right for you.