

Stand up to  
**Youth Loneliness**

# Youth Loneliness Professionals Resource Pack



**Community First  
Yorkshire**





Loneliness can affect everyone no matter their age. Most young people feel lonely at times, but it can be difficult for them to talk about it and even more difficult to ask for help. But we can all help to make this easier. [#LetsTalkLoneliness](#).

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## What is loneliness?

***“Loneliness occurs when there is a gap between our actual and desired social relationships, and when the quality or quantity of these relationships does not meet our expectations.”***

According to the report ‘Children’s and young people’s experiences of loneliness: 2018’ from the ONS (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018>), 11.3% of 10-15 year olds and 9.8% of 16-24 year olds said that they were ‘often’ lonely.

More recently, 43% of young people aged 17-25 who used Action for Children services said they had problems with loneliness, and we know it affects younger ages too.

We all get lonely sometimes and loneliness is a normal emotion like being happy, angry, sad or excited. Everyone feels it from time to time and everybody’s experience of loneliness is different.

But loneliness is not the same as being alone. Loneliness is different from social isolation, aloneness and solitude. The element of choice when deciding how alone or not we want to be is important.

Young people might be surrounded by their family or peers, but they can still feel like they are on their own or that no one understands how they feel. Loneliness is less about the number of friends and more about the quality of those relationships. It is also about how a young person feels. Some may be very happy to spend a lot of time alone, while others may be part of a large social circle but still feel lonely and isolated.

This is what some young people in North Yorkshire have said about what loneliness feels like and what it is:

***“Loneliness feels like a dark dream with people all around me.”***

***“Loneliness is when you feel different from other people.”***

***“I don’t feel like I am understood and that makes me feel lonely.”***

***“Sometimes, people make comments and I don’t feel like I fit in.”***

Although loneliness is often seen as an issue that predominantly affects older people, surveys have shown that 18-24 year olds are most likely to say they have felt lonely. We also know that the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown have increased the risk and likelihood of loneliness in younger people.

Though loneliness can be a common feeling, it becomes a bigger problem if it develops into a chronic condition and stops a young person from achieving what they want in life.

## What causes feelings of loneliness and how does it impact on mental health?

There are many different reasons that a young person feels lonely but, often, loneliness is worse during a transitional period such as moving school, changing year group, moving to a different neighbourhood, during a relationship change or family break-up, leaving home for work or further education, or during bereavement.

There are also certain groups that are at greater risk of loneliness. These include young carers, those living with a disability or long-term illness, LGBTQ+, those in care and those who suffer from bullying.

Feeling lonely can affect overall mental health, especially if these feelings are persistent or chronic. It can cause feelings of anxiety or depression, can lower self-esteem and confidence, cause sleep problems, increase stress and even lead to self-harm.

The negative perceptions of what lonely and isolated people are like has increased the stigma associated with loneliness among young people. Research suggests that many young people find it embarrassing to admit to, or talk about, loneliness as it suggests a kind of perceived 'failing'. There is also a sense that loneliness could be caused by a person's own actions and that people who feel lonely may have themselves to blame.

The negative perceptions of loneliness may get in the way of young people seeking help or offering support to others. In addition, the negative perceptions held by those in the wider society can mean that young people's feelings are invalidated if they are told to simply 'get over it' or 'deal with it'.

Asking young people to think about what is making them feel lonely may help them find a way of reconnecting and reaching out to other people in a similar situation to them.

## How can young people look after themselves?

Normalising the conversation around loneliness can reduce the stigma, open up opportunities for conversation and reduce the self-blame associated with loneliness.

Some young people will be able to access and utilise self-help forums and information to help deal with their loneliness. However, they should be encouraged to speak to others about how they feel and seek support from a trusted source like The Go-To ([www.thegoto.org.uk](http://www.thegoto.org.uk)).

They should also be encouraged to seek out opportunities to build confidence and self-esteem, so that they feel more confident when they meet new people and can focus on the positives of who they are. This could include joining a club or volunteering to increase opportunities for interaction and meet people with similar interests and ideas.

## How can schools or colleges help?

Creating a supportive environment where students look out for others and are able to talk openly without fear of stigma, about their own loneliness will go some way to tackling loneliness within your setting. Our posters are great tools and cover a range of topics about loneliness.

However, there are wider opportunities to engage with the conversation around loneliness such as:

- Encourage your local school councils or youth groups to investigate youth loneliness in your own area and come up with ideas on how to tackle it.
- Taking part in the annual Lonely Not Alone campaign (<https://lonelynotalone.org/>). This campaign encourages young people to wear yellow socks for one day a year to show solidarity with others experiencing loneliness. The campaign usually runs in the autumn.
- Creating opportunities for micro volunteering within your setting or school.
- Explore volunteering opportunities for young people to help reduce loneliness in your area through existing schemes, such as Duke of Edinburgh or NCS.
- Encourage a group of young people to write a report for the BBC Young Reporters Competition on youth loneliness.

## Where to go for help

The Go-To website ([www.thegoto.org.uk](http://www.thegoto.org.uk)) is a trusted source of information and has advice on a range of subjects including loneliness. They have links on their website to other organisations like Childline, Action for Children and Mind.

### Other resources

The **#LetsTalkLoneliness video** from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport is a good way of introducing the topic of loneliness to younger people and reducing the stigma. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLuYesILJpM>)

**The Youth Isolation toolkit** by Neighbourhood Watch has a range of information and resources on youth loneliness for both professionals and parents. This ranges from further information on loneliness to advice and signposting for young people to guidance on ensuring that your project reduces youth loneliness. There are also a number of short YouTube videos and longer TedX talks that can be used during lesson or session plans when talking about loneliness. <https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/crime-prevention/reducing-risk-toolkits/youth-isolation-toolkit/youth-isolation-0>

The **Tackling Youth Loneliness** website (<https://tacklingyouthloneliness.org.uk/>) is a National Youth Partnership project and has been designed to bring together a set of dedicated resources alongside useful research and information to support organisations and professionals to develop their understanding of youth loneliness and isolation, as well as exploring ways to help young people begin to tackle it. Resources include a Sense Check Tool and the short We Are You film, made by young people, which can be used to start conversations about loneliness and isolation.

**Make Some Noise** have produced some short movies to share with young people in Year 6/7 about the subjects of loneliness, moving to High School and helping others. It includes teacher's notes on the videos and a corresponding lesson plan. More details available on their website. (<http://www.make-some-noise.com/rise/>).

Dr Gerine Lodder, assistant professor of developmental psychology at Tilburg University, explains the problem of adolescent loneliness and how it can affect someone throughout their life in her TedX Talk '**What you don't know about adolescent loneliness**'. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4m4DPC1jZY>).

For tips and advice on youth volunteering, you can visit the volunteering director, **Volunteering in North Yorkshire**. (<https://portal.communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk/volunteering>).

This lesson plan for Key Stage 4 explores the effect that loneliness can have on mental health and emotional wellbeing. It examines some of the causes of loneliness and what could be done to combat it. The lesson is not designed to be taught in isolation, but within the PSHE mental health and wellbeing education programme.

(<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing-lesson-plans>).

### Learning Objective

Students will learn:

- about some of the causes of loneliness
- ways to prevent and overcome loneliness

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- identify some of the causes of loneliness
- explain strategies to help prevent and overcome loneliness

### Resources for Learning

- Resource 1 : “Would you rather” game
- Resource 2: #LetsTalkLoneliness video
- Resource 3: Post it notes
- Resource 4: Challenge forum posts

### Key Words

Loneliness, mental health, emotional wellbeing, support

Activity	Description	Timing
1. Introduction	Introduce ground rules and outline the objectives and outcomes	5 minutes
2. Baseline assessment	Students play a “Would you rather game”	10 minutes
3. Identifying loneliness	The #LetsTalkLoneliness video is used as a conversation starter to explore key life points and loneliness	10 minutes
4. Challenge forum	Students work in groups to offer advice on a wellbeing forum targeted at loneliness	20 minutes
5. Assessing progress and reflection	Students reflect on how their confidence in managing loneliness has developed as a result of the lesson	5 minutes
6. Signposting	Signpost students to sources of support	5 minutes

## Baseline Assessment

### Introduction - 5 minutes

- Establish or reinforce existing ground rules, emphasising those that are especially relevant to this lesson.
- Explain that today's lesson will be looking at loneliness - how it can occur at certain times in our lives and what steps can be taken to overcome it.

### Baseline assessment activity – 10 minutes

Play a game of 'Would you rather' either electronically through a platform such as Kahoot or with questions displayed on a board in the room. Ask questions such as:

- Would you rather lose all of your money or all of your photos?
- Would you rather be the funniest or smartest person in the room?
- Would you rather be in a small school where everyone knows who you are or a large school where you become part of a crowd?
- Would you rather be the best player on a losing team or the worst player on a winning team?
- Would you rather have the superpower of invisibility or of flight?
- Would you rather have only two close friends or many mates?

Ask the students to split into pairs and discuss how these questions identify what is important to the individual, what they say about fitting in, being part of a group and loneliness.

*Take feedback, gauging the extent to which the groups can relate to the game and the concepts that it introduces, and adjust the lesson content if necessary.*

## Core Activities

### Identifying loneliness – 10 minutes

Ask students to write down on post-it notes some of the causes of loneliness identified within the #LetsTalkLoneliness video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLuYesILJpM>). Ask them to place these on a board within the classroom and have a discussion about what was identified.

Students are likely to identify transition periods such as changing school or neighbourhood, but should also identify particular life circumstances such as being a young carer or having a disability. Ask if there is anything, not mentioned in the video, which they think is important.

***Development: You could develop this activity using the following questions:***

- ***How could bullying make someone feel more lonely?***
- ***How could you make someone feel more accepted?***
- ***What could you look out for in others that might show they are lonely?***
- ***How do you think loneliness affects someone's mental health?***

### Challenge forum – 20 minutes

Working in groups, ask students to imagine that they are working for an online wellbeing forum focusing on loneliness. They are asked to give advice to young people on how to manage their loneliness. Give each group a different scenario and ask them to write back to the person, giving them advice about what they could do to overcome their loneliness.

Once complete, students share their responses with the rest of the class and exchange feedback. Pick up on key suggestions especially telling someone how you feel, getting support, meeting new people and volunteering.

There are suggested forum scenarios at the end of this document.

***Support: It may be helpful to have some model responses to each scenario before setting students this task or having a selection of ideas that written on a board to stimulate the discussion. Some of the suggested scenarios are quite distressing and it may be appropriate to have additional support for those students who find this a difficult topic.***

### Plenary/Assessment of learning

#### Assessing progress and reflection – 5 minutes

Ask the students to revisit their original ideas on loneliness to see if they have changed. Using post-it notes, ask them to write down one thing they have learnt about loneliness or one thing that they would say to a friend who was feeling lonely. Add these to a board in the classroom as part of a final discussion.

#### Signposting support – 5 minutes

Remind students that they can access support. Explain that there are lots of different ways to seek help from reputable organisations, including:

- Online: The Go-To ([www.thegoto.org.uk](http://www.thegoto.org.uk))
- Forum: Kooth ([www.kooth.com/](http://www.kooth.com/))
- Text: Compass Buzz (T: 07520 631168)
- Phone: Childline (T: 0800 1111)

It may be necessary to lift the mood after this session. End on a high note. Perhaps end with the video from Lonely Not Alone (<https://youtu.be/zJUzvQTDa1M>)

### Extension activity

Ask students to get involved in the annual Lonely Not Alone campaign or do a piece on loneliness for the BBC Young Reporters competition.

### Resource 4: Challenge Forum Scenarios

1. Please help! I feel very distant from my friends. We've all been friends since primary school, but now that we are in secondary school we don't see each other as much since we are all in different classes. I've noticed that we don't have as much in common anymore and we are starting to drift apart. I'm starting to not hang out with people and it's making me feel down. What can I do?
2. Social media is getting me down. Every time I look at my social media feeds I see friends meeting up and doing things. I'm never invited and I'm starting to feel left out. I don't want them to know that I am feeling this way but I don't want to keep getting notifications about what they are doing. How can I stop feeling so left out?
3. I'm finding it difficult to meet up with friends. You see my mum is not very well and when I get home from school, I have to help her around the house. Over the weekends I have to help look after my little sister so I don't have much time on my hands. My friends don't understand why I can't meet up and I keep having to say no. I'm worried that they will stop asking me to join them when they do things. What can I do to stop feeling so isolated?
4. I'm struggling to find people to talk to. My disability means that I can't do the things that everyone else does and so I'm left out a lot of the time. I get bullied a lot of the time and I struggle to meet new people. I can't go one like this as I'm struggling with my mental health. Is there anyone who can help me?





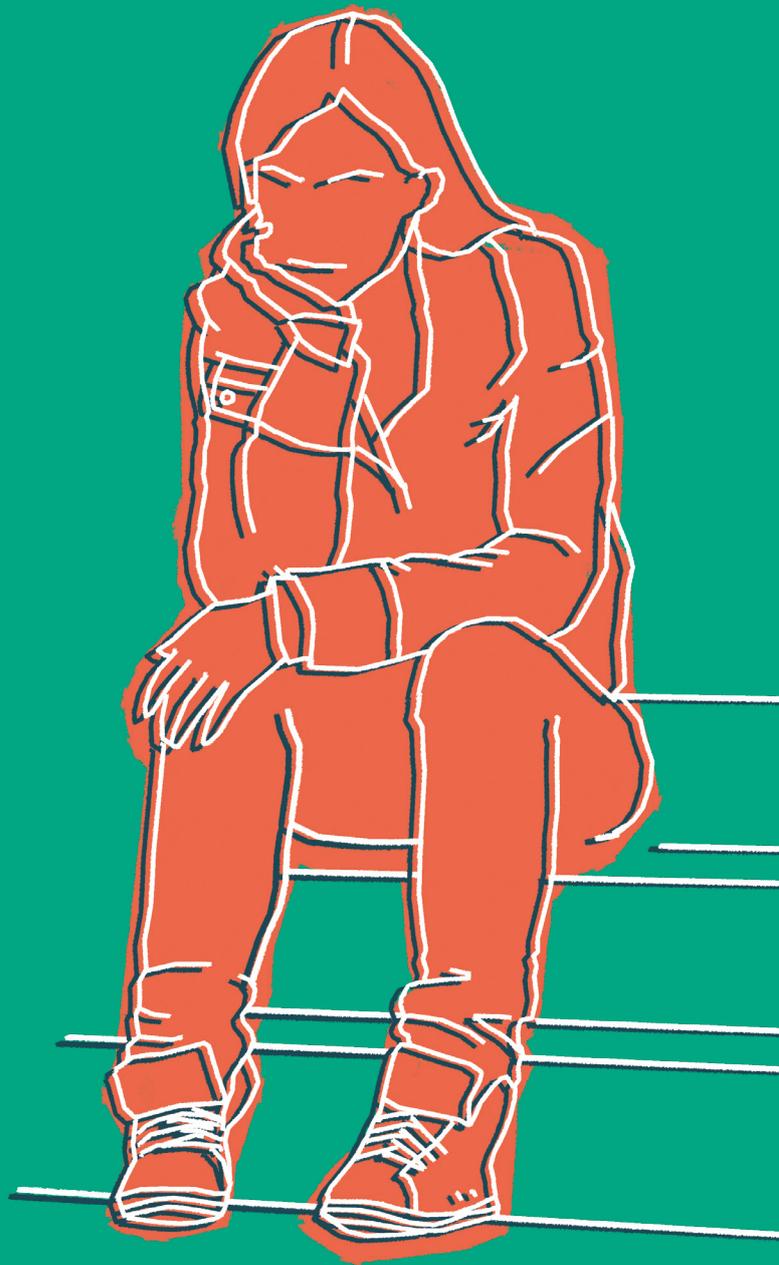
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