

**A Student Guide to**



**LONELINESS**



Mental Health  
Foundation



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[Mental Health Foundation](#) is the UK's leading prevention focussed mental health charity.

Our vision is a world with good mental health for all, aiming to help people understand, protect and sustain their mental health.

Each year we host [Mental Health Awareness Week](#) - an annual event when there is an opportunity for the whole of the UK to focus on achieving good mental health.

Each year, since 2001, we continue to set the theme, organise, and host the week. The event has grown to become one of the biggest awareness weeks across the UK and globally.

**This year the theme is loneliness.**

This guide contains tips on how to look after your mental health when feeling lonely and how you can get involved.

Join us in raising awareness and reducing the stigma of mental health and loneliness in your sixth form, college, university, or community.

# What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the negative feeling we have when there is a mismatch between the relationships we want and the ones we have, both in terms of quality and quantity.

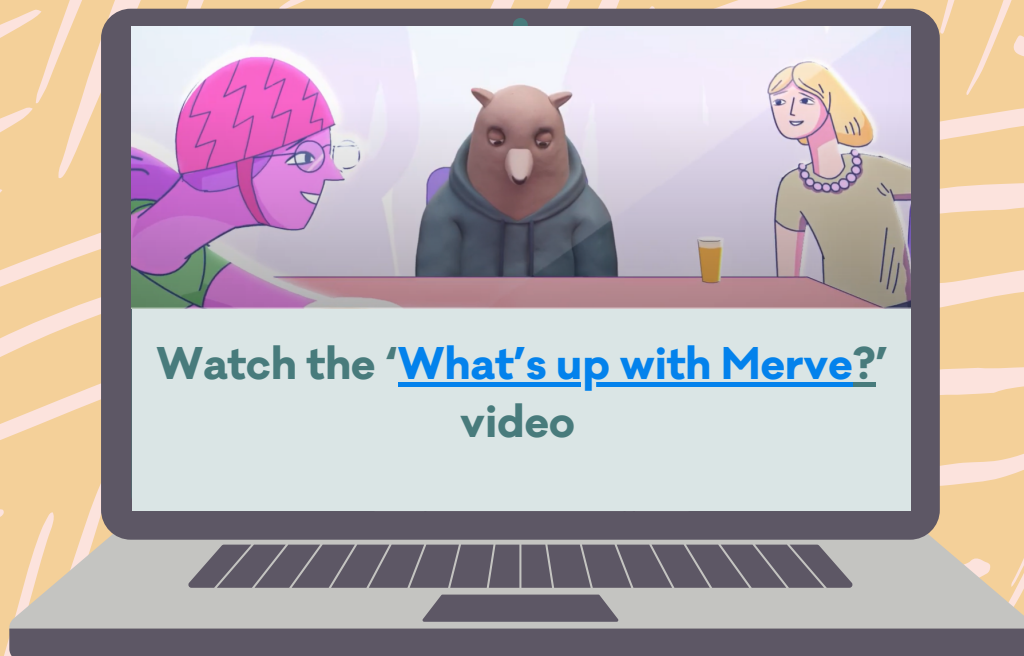
Loneliness is feeling alone, not being alone.

A person can be lonely in a room full of people.

Social isolation, though closely linked, is not the same as loneliness.

Social isolation is a lack of social contacts, this can be measured by the number of relationships someone has or the size of their social network.

Being socially isolated doesn't necessarily mean you feel lonely.



## Ask yourself:

- Do you recognise what Merve is feeling?
- Have you ever felt that way?
- When you feel lonely, are you able to shift the feeling easily, or does it persist?

# Loneliness in students

As a student, you will experience many life changes such as going to university or starting the world of work, making new friends, or moving away from those you are close to.

Experiencing change and making life decisions can impact our sense of belonging – an emotional need to connect with, and be accepted by a group such as peer, community, religious and family groups .

**A lack of belonging can be linked to increased feelings of loneliness.**

Although anyone can feel lonely, there are groups that are at higher risk of loneliness, such as people who belong to a minority group and live in an area without many people from a similar background, people who experience discrimination because of their gender, race, sexual orientation or a disability.

**UOK?**

We deliver a university, college and sixth-form based project that aims to equip students with the skills to look after their mental health. [Find out more!](#)

"Student loneliness has been shown to be the strongest overall predictor of mental distress in the student population"

University Mental Health Charter, 2019

Even before the pandemic, 88% Britons aged from 18 to 24 said they experience loneliness to some degree, with 24% experiencing often and 7% saying they are lonely all of the time.

# Impact on mental health

Loneliness is very closely linked to mental health, it can be a cause and an effect of poor mental health.

If we feel lonely it might lead to poor mental health and if our mental health is poor it can lead to feelings of loneliness.

**FEELING LONELY**

**POOR MENTAL HEALTH**

There are [well established links between loneliness and poor mental health](#). In a recent review of the scientific literature, loneliness was associated with future mental health problems up to 9 years later with the strongest association being with depression.

## **SHORT TERM - TRANSIENT LONELINESS**

Most of us will experience this from time to time, it is usually caused by a certain situation or event, for example, a change in relationship. Loneliness can be eased through improvements in the situation.

## **LONG TERM - CHRONIC LONELINESS**

This is when feelings of loneliness are sustained. When this happens loneliness can start affecting daily life. The longer we feel lonely, the more we are at risk of developing mental health problems.

## **Chronic loneliness can lead to an increased risk of:**

- Low mood
- Low self esteem
- Poor sleep
- Increased anxiety
- Increased stress

Loneliness is a common experience that sometimes leads to feelings of shame.

[Read this student's story.](#)



# Tackling loneliness

**Loneliness is a very common human experience and something we will all feel at one time or another. These tips have been adapted from our [Unlocking Loneliness Campaign](#). Check it out!**

## EXPLORE YOUR FEELINGS

Think about how you are feeling and what could be contributing to this, it can be helpful to keep a journal and note down our feelings.

By better understanding what makes us feel the way we feel, we can do more to learn what works for us and protect our mental health.



## BE AWARE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Remember to take social media with a pinch of salt, people tend to post the positive aspects of their lives, that doesn't mean they don't have feelings of loneliness.

If social media is having a negative impact on your mental health or making you feel lonely, why not try unfollowing or muting the accounts that bring up difficult feelings and start following accounts that make you feel empowered.

## SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE YOU TRUST

Good quality, strong and supportive relationships can prevent us feeling lonely and be a source of support when we do. Spending time with people we trust and enjoy spending time with is good for our mental health.

Check out our [Healthy Relationships](#) campaign.



## FIND YOUR TRIBE

Finding people with similar interests that we can relate to will help us to feel more connected.

If you are a university student, clubs and societies are a great way to meet new people.

Sites like [Meetup](#) are another way to meet people who share similar interests. Go along to an event and see!

I joined a sports team and met so many new people with similar interests to me! Joining a sports team gave me a sense of purpose and a sense of community. I have met so many great friends because of it.

*Alisha,  
student at  
Manchester  
Metropolitan*

I don't always put self-care first and feel guilty about not studying or working on assignments

*MHF Young  
Leader*

For some students, the increased workload of sixth form, college and university means that it is easy to neglect looking after yourself, and making time to spend time with people you care about.

Being disconnected from the people you need, and the things that you enjoy can increase feelings of loneliness.

Check out our student led campaign [Behind the Books](#)

## FIND BALANCE

## FIND NEW WAYS TO OPEN UP

Talking to a friend or a professional about how we are feeling can really help.



### Check out:

The [Hub of Hope](#) – this is a national database that shows you mental health support services near you. [Side by Side](#), a community platform run by Mind.



## PEOPLE WHO WILL LISTEN

### The Mix

Whether you want a quick chat or more focused help, the trained team at The Mix will be there to help.

**Text THEMIX to 85258**

or use one of their other helpline platforms.



### Shout

**shout**  
**85258**

here for you 24/7

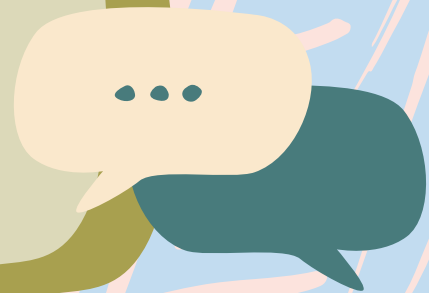
If you are struggling to cope and need to talk, trained Shout Volunteers are here for you, day or night.

Shout 85258 is a free, confidential, anonymous text support service.

### Samaritans

Whatever you're going through, you can call Samaritans at any time, from any phone for free. They will listen. They won't judge or tell you what to do.

**Call free on 116 123.**



## PEOPLE WHO WILL LISTEN

### Student Space

One-to-one support for whatever challenge you are facing, designed for students

**Text STUDENT to 85258**

or go to their website for information on webchat, phone and email support



### Muslim Youth Helpline

Faith and culturally sensitive support by phone, live chat, whatsapp or email

**Call 0808 808 2008**

7 days a week 4pm - 10pm



### Mermaids

Helpline and web chat service aimed at supporting transgender and gender-diverse young people up to and including the age of 19, their families and professionals working with them.

**Call 0808 801 0400**



# Get involved!

**Why not raise awareness or fundraise in your college, sixth form or university. This is a great way to tackle stigma and reduce loneliness. We have provided some ideas here, or you can come up with your own.**

## Think about:

- How much time you have
- How to promote/advertise
- Who can help you organise
  - A member of staff
  - Friends
  - A group or society

**#IVEBEENTHERE**

Share your experience with the hashtag #IveBeenThere to support your community and tackle stigma.

## ORGANISE AN EVENT

### HIGH OR LOW TIME COMMITMENT

Put on an event to bring people together, this will be a great opportunity to meet people you might not ordinarily meet and get them talking about Mental Health Awareness Week.

Send out invites or put up posters using invite template (at the back of this guide), set up in a central location where passers-by will also see and can join in.

### Event Ideas

- A picnic in the park
- A boardgame evening
- An open mic night
- A fashion show
- A sports day

### Tips to get conversation flowing

It can be daunting to start a conversations with someone you don't know, try some of these ideas.

- Hand out conversation starters to help break the ice (page 18)
- Play a game
- Run a quiz
- Have music playing
- Have snacks and refreshments



## ORGANISE A WALK

LOW TIME COMMITMENT

Getting out into [nature](#) is proven to benefit our mental health.

Set a central location to meet on campus and use an invite or a poster to invite fellow students. If anyone has one, why not take a dog?

Spread the word by sharing it on social media or handing out invites.



## SET UP A 'MESSAGE WALL'

LOW TIME COMMITMENT

In your common room or a central location on campus encourage people to write encouraging messages to someone who might be feeling lonely. You could ask them to finish this sentence "When I feel lonely I..."

This is a nice visual reminder that everyone feels lonely sometimes and gives students who may be experiencing loneliness a place to get advice.

## ORGANISE A TALK

LOW TIME COMMITMENT

Make the most of the expertise you have at your university, ask someone to act as a guest speaker on loneliness and mental health – you could even make this part of your get together.

## SET UP A STALL

LOW TIME COMMITMENT



Set up a stall and talk to passers-by about Mental Health Awareness Week and Loneliness.

You could share the tips on how to look after your mental health on pages 7-10.

## WEAR IT GREEN

LOW TIME COMMITMENT

Wear it Green Day is our flagship fundraiser for Mental Health Awareness Week - encourage your fellow students and staff to wear green to raise awareness.

You could combine wearing it green with one of the other activity suggestions.

Download the [Wear it Green pack](#).



## RUN A TEA AND TALK

MEDIUM TIME COMMITMENT

Invite people to get together and chat over a cup of tea and maybe even some cake.

Download the [Tea and Talk pack](#)



## RUN AN ACTIVITY

MEDIUM TIME COMMITMENT

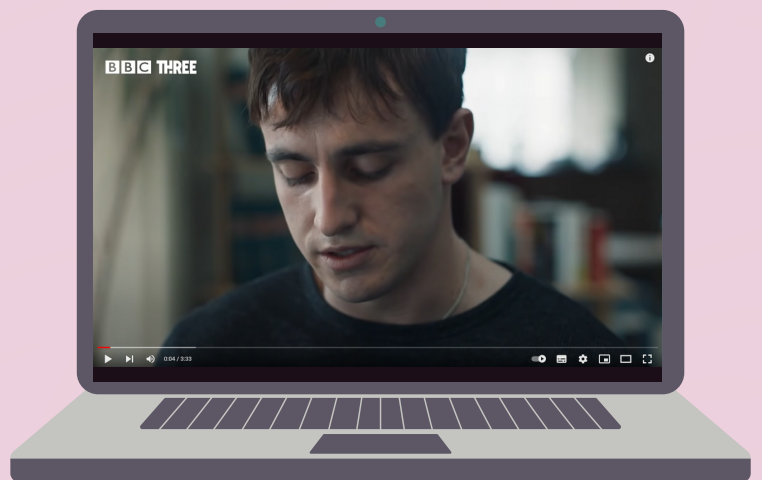
Run an activity with friends, your class, your society or housemates. Get them talking about loneliness and the impact it has on mental health.

Below are some suggested activities and discussion points.

### BELONGING VIDEO

Watch this scene from [BBC's Normal People](#)

- How did it feel to watch this?
- Would you say he has had, or is having feelings of loneliness?
- What would you suggest if a friend was feeling this way?



See pages 7-10 on how to look after your mental health when feeling lonely and ask the group to share their ideas.

## IDENTITY AND BELONGING ACTIVITY

### STEP 1

- Ask everyone to write down 5 words that represent them. Either descriptive words, or words that represent different roles we play, e.g. sister, friend, footballer, funny, caring.
  - Without sharing their words, ask how it felt to pick them. Was it easy/hard? Was five too few/too many?
- 

### STEP 2

- Ask everyone to give their list to the person next to them without explaining why they chose these words.
  - Ask everyone to cross out two words from their neighbour's list, keeping the three words they think are most important
  - Ask everyone to give the lists back to the authors
- 

### STEP 3

- Ask some prompt questions to encourage discussion
    - How does it feel to see the words you have left?
    - How did it feel to have someone else cross words off?
    - Do you feel like the remaining three words truly represent you?
    - Do you think the three words would be different if your best friend selected them?
    - Do you think your different groups of friends would pick the same or similar words?
- 

### STEP 4

Explain that sometimes as we change, make new friends and lose contact with others; we might feel like our whole self isn't seen, we might feel a disconnect between different groups and not quite feel like we belong.

Lacking a sense of belonging can lead to feelings of loneliness and this can negatively affect our mental health.

See pages 7-10 on how to look after your mental health when feeling lonely and ask the group to share their ideas.

# Make it a fundraiser!

No matter what type of activity you are organising, you can always add in a fundraising element to this.

For example, whether you are organising a Wear it Green Day, a walk, or a quiz night, you could set a small fee for fellow students to take part. You can also get creative with your fundraising by adding a competitive element to your activity.

Once you have decided what you want to do, don't forget to download one of our [posters](#) and spread the word about your event!

No matter how much you raise, every donation will help us challenge the mental health stigma so that people and communities can thrive.

## PAYING IN YOUR FUNDRAISING

There are a few ways you can pay in your fundraising donations: You can set up a [JustGiving](#) page to collect donations, or you go to the Mental Health Foundation's online donation page:

**[mentalhealth.org.uk/donate](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/donate)**

If you'd like us to send you a paying in slip please email [events@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:events@mentalhealth.org.uk) and we'll organise this for you.

When sending us your donations, make sure you always bank the money yourself! Never send cash through the post as it could get lost or stolen.

You can send us a cheque payable to Mental Health Foundation to:

Mental Health Foundation

Studio 2

197 Long Lane

London

SE1 4PD





# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

EVENT:

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WHERE:

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WHEN:

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CONTACT:

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"Student loneliness has been shown to be the strongest overall predictor of mental distress in the student population"

University Mental  
Health Charter,  
2019

Even before the pandemic, 88% Britons aged from 18 to 24 said they experience loneliness to some degree, with 24% experiencing often and 7% saying they are lonely all of the time.

# Conversation starters

It's always good to talk but knowing where to start can be difficult. That's why we've created conversation starters that you can use as a starting point. We have some examples here, you can also email us at [events@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:events@mentalhealth.org.uk) and we'll pop some more out in the post for you!

What is your dream holiday destination?

What is something you are grateful for today?

If you were to recommend one thing I could do to improve my wellbeing, what would it be?

✧  
Do you think there are more wheels or doors in the world?

What is your dream meal?

# Mental Health Awareness Week

9 - 15 May 2022

#IveBeenThere



Mental Health  
Foundation



[mentalhealth.org.uk](https://mentalhealth.org.uk)

Facebook: [mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundation)

Twitter: [@mentalhealth](https://twitter.com/mentalhealth)

Instagram: [@mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthfoundation)

Mental Health Foundation  
*London. Cardiff. Glasgow.*

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

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