



advice and support for older age

**Independent  
Age**

# Factsheet

## How to stay socially connected

Social groups, activities and befriending services for older people.

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**Next review date: November 2016**

Independent Age provides advice to help people claim benefits, access social care and stay independent at home. Our local volunteers provide friendship visits and calls for lonely older people. To find out how Independent Age can help you, call us FREE on **0800 319 6789** or visit **[independentage.org](http://independentage.org)**



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# 1. Why staying connected is important

Being on your own or feeling lonely is a common experience, but it can make us lose confidence, feel miserable and eat away at our self-esteem.

It can happen for many different reasons. It may be that you find retirement harder to adjust to than you anticipated. It's not uncommon to feel lost or as though your life lacks purpose when you stop working. We're also more likely to lose loved ones or have mobility difficulties that make it harder to get out and about in later life. Despite our best efforts, we can end up spending more time on our own than we'd like to. We can also feel lonely even if we're still in touch with family, friends or people in our neighbourhood.

Thankfully, there are lots of organisations and services out there to help older people connect with others - and most cost very little or nothing at all. Staying connected is good for our health and can bring a sense of contentment back to our lives.

This factsheet lists some social activities and befriending services that may be of interest and includes some practical steps that can help you feel more connected.

If none of these seem right for you or you want more information, you can phone our free advice service. Our expert advisers can tell you about all the support out there that's relevant for you. Call us on 0800 319 6789, or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

## 2. Social groups and activities

These organisations offer a range of activities you may enjoy. They may help you to meet new people and make new friends.

**Contact the Elderly** organise regular Sunday afternoon tea parties for people over 75 who live with little or no social support. The tea parties are hosted by volunteers and drivers are available to pick you up and take you home afterwards. Call them on 0800 716543 or visit [contact-the-elderly.org.uk](http://contact-the-elderly.org.uk).

**English Bridge Society** can help you find a local bridge club whether you're a keen player or enthusiastic beginner. Call 0129 631 7210 or visit [ebu.co.uk](http://ebu.co.uk) to find out more.

**Extend** offers gentle exercise classes for older and disabled people, no matter what your fitness level. Regular weekly classes are a good way to meet new people. Call 0158 2 83 2760 or visit [extend.org.uk](http://extend.org.uk) to find your nearest class.

**Lunch clubs** are sometimes provided locally by social services (contact your local council), Age UK (0800 169 6565) or the Salvation Army (020 7367 4500, [salvationarmy.org.uk](http://salvationarmy.org.uk)). Food Cycle offers free lunches from food that would otherwise go to waste at its centres across England. Call them on 020 7729 2775 or visit [foodcycle.org.uk](http://foodcycle.org.uk) to find out if there's one near you.

**Making Music** has a database of amateur music groups across the UK, including choirs and local festivals. Find out what groups are near you at [makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list](http://makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list).

**Men's Sheds** provide a place for men to work on practical projects at their own pace in a friendly and supportive venue, or simply meet new friends. Find your nearest shed by visiting [menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed](http://menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed).

**The Ramblers Association** has walking groups all over the UK for all ages and all stages of fitness, including those with disabilities. Find the details of your local group by calling 020 7339 8500 or visiting [ramblers.org.uk](http://ramblers.org.uk).

**Switchboard, LGBT+ Helpline** can provide details of local social and support groups for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Or you can give them a ring to talk about anything on your mind. Call them on 0300 330 0630 or visit [llgs.org.uk](http://llgs.org.uk).

**Thrive** runs gardening programmes for people who are isolated or have a physical or mental disability including sight or hearing loss or dementia. They have four centres and also run free indoor gardening courses for older people at venues across the UK. Call them on 0118 988 5688 or visit [thrive.org.uk](http://thrive.org.uk).

**Townswomen's Guilds** have local groups across the country where you can socialise, campaign and learn new skills. Call them on 0121 326 0400 or visit [the-tg.com](http://the-tg.com) for more information or to find your local guild.

**The University of the Third Age (U3A)** is a national network of learning groups run by retired volunteers providing creative, educational and leisure opportunities in a friendly environment. Membership is cheap and it's a great way to meet new people and keep your mind active. Call 020 8466 6139 or visit [u3a.org.uk](http://u3a.org.uk) to find out what's on offer near you.

**Walking for Health** provides free short walks – many as short as half an hour – for anyone who wants to join in. The walks tend to start at a central point, like a community centre or library, are led by a trained volunteer and are open to all. To find a walk near you, call 020 7339 8541 or visit [walkingforhealth.org.uk](http://walkingforhealth.org.uk).

**The Women's Institute (WI)** runs interesting events and activities for women to learn about arts, crafting, science, sports and leisure. You can visit local groups to find one that's right for you before you pay to become a member. Call 020 7371 9300 or visit [thewi.org.uk](http://thewi.org.uk).

**Your local Age UK** may run social events, lunch clubs or exercise groups for older people or know of local activities you could join. Age UK also has friendship centres that organise their own activities such as lunches, outings, walks and bowling. Call 0800 169 6565 or visit [ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk) to find out what's available in your area.

**Volunteering** can be a good way to connect with others while doing something valuable. It may give you the opportunity to use your skills and past experience and learn new skills too.

Many of the organisations listed above have volunteering opportunities, as does Independent Age. If you would like to volunteer for us, get in touch by calling 0800 319 6789, or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

Alternatively, contact your nearest Volunteer Centre to find out about local opportunities – visit [ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre](http://ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre). RSVP (the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme) has details of volunteering opportunities for people over 50. Call them on 020 3780 5875 or visit [csv-rsvp.org.uk](http://csv-rsvp.org.uk).

### 3. Befriending and support

If you'd like some company, a chat on the phone or a chance to meet new people, there are plenty of organisations to help.

**Independent Age** offers befriending services by telephone for those who find it difficult to get out or just prefer to talk on the phone than face-to-face. A volunteer calls weekly or monthly for a chat at an agreed time for as long as you need them to. We also have volunteer visitors who make regular visits to your home to sit and chat over a cup of tea. Call us on 0800 319 6789 or visit [independentage.org](http://independentage.org) if you think you might like a befriender and to discuss what might be available to you.

**Age UK** runs a Call in Time phone service for people over 60 offering a weekly call from a volunteer or short daily calls several times a week for those going through a difficult time. Call them on 0800 169 6565 (or visit [ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)) to find out about this and the other befriending services they offer through local Age UKs.

**Befriending Networks** is a membership organisation for befriending schemes that support people of all ages. You can search their database to find a local befriending service by visiting [befriending.co.uk/befriendingdirectory.php](http://befriending.co.uk/befriendingdirectory.php).

**Friends of the Elderly** offer a range of free services for older people over the age of 60 including telephone befriending, home support in some areas and day clubs. Call them on 020 7730 8263 or visit [fote.org.uk](http://fote.org.uk).

**Mind** offers a range of services to people living with mental ill health through its network of 140 local partner charities. Some areas have befriending and peer support schemes. Call them on 0300 123 3393 or visit [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk) to see if there's a scheme in your area.

**Royal Voluntary Service (RVS)** provides services for older people including befriending, Good Neighbour Schemes, practical help at home - such as giving you a lift to a hospital appointment - lunch clubs and advice centres. Call 0845 608 0122 or visit [royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](http://royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk) to find out what's available in your area.

**The Silver Line** is a free, confidential helpline for older people offering advice, friendship or just a good chat. It's open 24 hours a day, every day of the year – even Christmas Day. Call 0800 470 8090 or visit [thesilverline.org.uk](http://thesilverline.org.uk). They also provide a Silver Letters services where you can exchange regular letters for free with a volunteer.

**Talking Communities** are telephone-based discussion and support groups for older people. There are general friendship groups and specific interest groups, such as book clubs. Groups take place weekly or fortnightly. Call 020 7923 5250 or visit [communitynetworkprojects.org/join-a-talking-community](http://communitynetworkprojects.org/join-a-talking-community).

## 4. Emotional support

These organisations offer emotional support if you're going through a difficult time.

**Cruse Bereavement Care** can support you after the death of someone close. They offer emotional support over the phone, face-to-face, by email and in groups. Call their helpline on 0844 477 9400 or visit [cruse.org.uk](https://www.cruse.org.uk).

**Relate** can provide help with any difficulties in your relationships whether you're married, single, gay, straight or bisexual. They offer face-to-face counselling as well as counselling services by telephone, online or email. Call 0300 100 1234 or visit [relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-older-people](https://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-older-people).

**Samaritans** provide confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You don't have to be depressed or suicidal to call them – they're happy to talk through anything that's bothering you. Just call free on 116 123.

## 5. Other practical steps you can take

Feeling lonely or alone is a common experience that many people go through. You may have felt this way for a long time, or it may be something that comes and goes.

Loneliness isn't a sign of failure – just a normal human experience that can be overcome. Try some of our practical steps to getting connected.

### Free handbook to help you stay connected

Our free, practical Wise Guide: Healthy, Happy, Connected is packed with advice and tips on how to stay connected with others and get the most out of later life. Order it free on 0800 319 6789, or online at [independentage.org](http://independentage.org).

### What do you enjoy?

The cinema? Shopping? Going for a meal? Whatever it is, reach out and invite someone to do it with you. Chances are you know at least one person in the same boat as you who'd love to go out and often all it takes is an invitation or two to make it happen. Remember you may be entitled to senior discounts at cinemas, theatres, museums, hairdressers and more – so make sure you ask!

**Plan ahead** and try to book in one activity a day or spread your activities over the week. You could also try booking in something for, say, every Sunday, if that's the day you feel most bored. Doing this will keep you from feeling down and give you something to look forward to.

### Look after yourself

Taking small steps to eat well, gently exercise and keep active can help you feel better about yourself, sleep better and relax more fully in your own company. Many sports centres and

community centres have fitness classes for older people so it's worth finding out about these.

## **Go online**

For many people, the internet is a great way to connect with people and make new friends. There are forums and social networks where you can chat to people with similar interests. Use common sense about what you share and don't give out personal information or your bank details. UK Online Centres can help you learn basic computer skills. Call 0800 77 1234 or visit [ukonlinecentres.com](http://ukonlinecentres.com).

## **Find out about community transport in your area**

If you can't drive or don't have accessible public transport. Community transport is a safe and low-cost way to get to the shops, hospital and other local places. Call Community Transport Online on 0161 351 1475 or visit [ctonline.org.uk](http://ctonline.org.uk) to find out what's available in your area. You can also search online at [gov.uk/community-transport-services-shopmobility](http://gov.uk/community-transport-services-shopmobility).

## **Check out your community and neighbourhood**

To find out what local activities are being planned and book them up - singing groups, book clubs... Have a look at your local library or community centre. If you feel nervous, try one thing at a time while you build up your confidence. You can also talk to someone who is organising the activity so you get to know at least one person before you go.

## **Claim the money you're entitled to**

Phone an Independent Age adviser (0800 319 6789) to check you're claiming all the benefits you're due, especially if you're struggling to make ends meet. After all, a little extra money might mean being able to afford tea and cake in a cafe once a

week with a friend, or the membership fee to your local University of the Third Age group.

### **Read Mind's leaflet How to cope with loneliness**

It looks at how loneliness can affect your mental health and suggests simple ways to connect with people. Call 0300 123 3393 or visit [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk) for a copy.

This factsheet has been put together by Independent Age's expert advisers. It is not a full explanation of the law and is aimed at people aged over 60.

If you need this information in an alternative format (such as large-print or audio cd), call us on 0800 319 6789 or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

## **Tell us what you think**

We'd love to hear what you think of our publications. Please write to us at the address below, phone us on 020 7605 4294 or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

We will use your feedback to help us plan for changes to our publications in the future. Thank you.

## **Supporting Independent Age**

If you have found this information helpful and would like to support our work, there are lots of ways you can help:

- get fit - run, walk or cycle in aid of Independent Age
- take part in our annual raffle
- donate in memory of a loved one
- remember Independent Age in your will and benefit from our Free Wills offer to supporters.

If you would like to donate or raise money in aid of Independent Age, please visit our website, email [supporters@independentage.org](mailto:supporters@independentage.org) or call our fundraising team on 020 7605 4288.