



advice and support for older age

**Independent
Age**

Factsheet

How to stay socially connected

Social groups, activities and befriending services for older people.

Call FREE on **0800 319 6789** Visit **www.independentage.org**

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About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago,
we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru
(0800 022 3444, agecymru.org.uk)
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland
(0800 12 44 222, agescotland.org.uk).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI
(0808 808 7575, ageni.org).

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1. Why staying connected is important

Being on your own when you don't want to be or feeling lonely is a common experience, but it can make us anxious, feel miserable, and eat away at our confidence and 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 health or 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.

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](tel:0800716543) or visit contact-the-elderly.org.uk.

English Bridge Union can help you find a local bridge club whether you're a keen player or enthusiastic beginner. Call [0129 631 7210](tel:01296317210) or visit ebu.co.uk to find out more.

Extend offers gentle exercise classes for older people 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](tel:01582832760) or visit 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](tel:08001696565)) or the Royal Voluntary Service ([0845 608 0122](tel:08456080122), royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk).

Making Music has a database of amateur music groups across the UK, including choirs and local festivals. Call them on [020 7939 6030](tel:02079396030) or find out what groups are near you at 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 supportive venue or simply meet new friends. Contact your local Age UK on [0800 169 6565](tel:08001696565) or Royal Voluntary Service on [0845 608 0122](tel:08456080122) to find out if there is one in your area.

National Association of Choirs has a database of over 700 choirs and can help you find a local choir. They also have details of events. Visit nationalassociationofchoirs.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 switchboard.lgbt.

Thrive runs gardening programmes for people who are isolated or have disabilities, including sight or hearing loss or dementia. They have four regional centres and also run community projects. They can also put you in touch with garden projects in your local area. Call them on **0118 988 5688** or visit thrive.org.uk.

UK Handknitting Association has information about knitting groups and events for beginners and experienced knitters and crocheters. Visit ukhandknitting.com.

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 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.

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.

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](tel:08001696565) or visit 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. You can find out more at independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering-opportunities. If you'd like to volunteer for us, get in touch by calling [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), or apply online at independentage.org/get-involved/apply-to-be-a-volunteer.

You could also help us to develop our information products by joining our Readers Panel. Call us for more information or visit independentage.org/readers-panel.

Alternatively, contact your nearest Volunteer Centre to find out about local opportunities. Visit 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 5870](tel:02037805870) or visit volunteeringmatters.org.uk/pillars/older-people.

You can also register your details on do-it.org.uk to find volunteering opportunities in your area.

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 rather 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](tel:08003196789) or visit 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. Call them on [0800 169 6565](tel:08001696565) (or visit ageuk.org.uk) to find out about this and the other befriending services they offer through local Age UKs.

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](tel:03001233393) or visit 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](tel:08456080122) or visit royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk to find out what's available in your area.

The Silver Line is a free, confidential helpline for older people offering information, advice, friendship or just a good chat. It's open 24 hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays. Call [0800 470 8090](tel:08004708090) or visit thesilverline.org.uk. They also provide a Silver Letters services where you can exchange regular letters for free with a volunteer.

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 [0808 808 1677](tel:08088081677) or visit cruse.org.uk.

Our free guide **Coping with bereavement** looks at how you might be feeling and has suggestions for where you can go for comfort and support. Order it free on [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), or online at independentage.org/publications.

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](tel:03001001234) or visit relate.org.uk/relationship-help.

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](tel:116123). For more information visit samaritans.org.

Carers Trust offers support to people who are caring for someone else, including online services such as forums, a chatroom and even a virtual coffee morning, for those who find it difficult to get out. Call [0300 123 2008](tel:03001232008) or visit carers.org.

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 guide to help you if you're feeling lonely

Our free, practical guide **If you're feeling lonely** is packed with advice on things you can try to help reduce loneliness, as well as information about where you can go to get help. Order it free on [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), or online at independentage.org/publications.

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. The Online Centres Network can help you learn basic computer skills. Call **0114 349 1666** or visit onlinecentresnetwork.org.

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 to find out what's available in your area. You can also search online at 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 could 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

Call the Independent Age helpline and arrange to speak to an 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.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request. Contact us using the details below.

Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this information was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us

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Email **advice@independentage.org**
Visit **www.independentage.org**