



**Independent  
Age**



# If you're feeling lonely

**How to stay connected  
in later life**



## Thank you

We would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed it for us. Our special thanks go to Re-engage, Omega and Marmalade Trust for their expert knowledge during the review.

## What do you think?

We welcome your feedback on our publications. We use your comments to plan future changes.

If you'd like to help us develop our information products, you can join our Readers' Panel. To find out more, call **020 7050 6560** or visit **[independentage.org/readers-panel](http://independentage.org/readers-panel)**.

## Our publications

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. To order them, call **0800 319 6789** or visit **[independentage.org/publications](http://independentage.org/publications)**.

If you would like this information in a different format – such as large print or audio CD – call us on **0800 319 6789** or email **[helpline@independentage.org](mailto:helpline@independentage.org)**.

While we make every reasonable effort to ensure that our information is accurate at the time of publication, we do not accept any liability arising from its use. Our information should not be used as a substitute for professional advice. The inclusion of other organisations does not constitute an endorsement from us.

The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

© Independent Age 2025

Author: Independent Age

Production: Independent Age

Design: Mark Errington

Photography: Leanne Benson pp3, 8, 10, 30, 33, 45; Maria Brosnan p14; Centre for Ageing Better pp13, 21, 22, 24, 27, 36, 40, 46, 53; Alan Fletcher p50; Elvis Katoto p7; Lee Townsend cover, pp37, 42

# Contents

About this guide	<b>2</b>
1. Why am I lonely?	<b>3</b>
2. Making connections	<b>8</b>
3. Overcoming barriers	<b>14</b>
4. Trying something new	<b>22</b>
5. Helping others	<b>33</b>
6. Partners and loneliness	<b>37</b>
7. Learning to be alone	<b>42</b>
8. If you're struggling	<b>46</b>
Denis's story	<b>50</b>
Checklist	<b>52</b>

Date of publication: January 2025

Next review date: January 2027

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout. We have changed the names of some of the interviewees who wished to be anonymous. Some of the images seen throughout this guide are posed by friends of Independent Age.

The PIF TICK is the UK-wide Quality Mark for Health Information.

# About this guide

Most of us will feel lonely at some point. Being alone doesn't always mean you'll feel lonely – people often choose to spend time alone and enjoy their own company. Others may feel lonely even when surrounded by people. Loneliness is the feeling of sadness that can come from not having the social contact you would like.

Loneliness is a personal experience and people find different ways to overcome these feelings. This guide has advice on simple things to try that could help reduce loneliness, and information on where to look for more support.



In this guide, you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or by visiting **[independentage.org/publications](https://independentage.org/publications)**.



## 1. Why am I lonely?

People feel lonely for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes, a particular event or change in circumstances may trigger these feelings, or you may have felt lonely for a long time without really knowing why.

# 1. Why am I lonely?

“ Loneliness just creeps up on you. None of us think it will happen to us, but suddenly it's there – you're on your own.

You might find yourself feeling lonely if:

- a partner, close relative or friend has died
- you've lost contact with friends or family, or don't feel close to those around you
- a relationship has broken down, or you don't feel supported by your relationships
- you no longer work and miss the social contact and sense of purpose this gave you
- you live alone
- you've moved to a new area
- you have an illness that makes you feel isolated from others, either emotionally or because it's hard for you to leave your home
- you have a visual or hearing impairment that affects your daily life
- you're caring for someone and don't have many chances to socialise

- you're living on a low income and can't afford to socialise as much as you'd like
- you're shy or have social anxiety
- you're feeling depressed.

These are just a few reasons people can feel lonely. But your loneliness may not have a direct cause and you don't need to look for one.

However, it may be helpful to notice when you're feeling lonely. You may find you feel lonely at certain times or that particular things trigger these feelings – for example, some people find Sunday the loneliest day because in the past they would have spent the day with family.

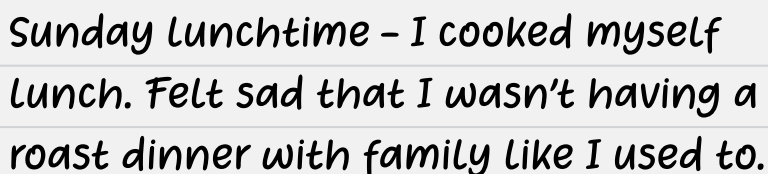
If you're aware of what makes you feel lonely, you can make changes that can help you feel better.

“ On Saturday, I was here all by myself, it was pouring with rain, not a great deal on the telly to amuse you – never is on a Saturday – and I got really down. I could have just sat and cried.

# 1. Why am I lonely?

## Keep a journal

You could try keeping a journal to record how you're feeling at different times. This could help you to work out what's making you feel lonely. Think about things you've enjoyed, things you've found difficult and whether certain days or times of day are better than others:



*Sunday lunchtime - I cooked myself  
lunch. Felt sad that I wasn't having a  
roast dinner with family like I used to.*

Try keeping the journal for a week, then go through it to see if you notice any patterns. For example, if you're loneliest at the weekend because no one is available to chat, could you sign up for an event? For example, Re-engage run monthly tea parties (**0800 716543**, [reengage.org.uk](http://reengage.org.uk)). Or, if you feel better on days when you've done a certain activity – such as cooking yourself a nice meal or taking a walk – could you do that more regularly? Try to set small targets for yourself and notice when you meet them.



## Share how you're feeling

Opening up to others can help you to feel less alone. If you have people around you but feel disconnected from them, try to talk to them about how you're feeling. It's easy to think that no one understands or cares about what you're going through, but that's unlikely to be true. Most people have experienced loneliness, so should be able to empathise. It can be reassuring to talk to people who have had similar experiences.





## 2. Making connections

Start by thinking about your current friends, family and acquaintances. Are there people you would like to talk to but have fallen out of contact with? How about people who you'd like to get to know better?

If the idea of a face-to-face meeting or phone call with someone you've lost touch with feels too daunting, you could send them a letter or email. Sometimes just thinking about the people you know, who care about you, can help you to feel less isolated.

If you don't have an existing group of people you're close to, think about the people you come across in your day-to-day life. Perhaps you could say hello to a neighbour if you see them outside, or chat to the newsagent who sells you your daily newspaper.

You don't have to be close to someone for a conversation to be meaningful. Any contact can make you feel more connected to those around you, even if it doesn't develop into a long-lasting friendship.

As a first step, just being around other people without talking to them can help you to feel more connected. You could try going to the local park, a library, a café or a public event. Spending time outdoors can help you feel connected and ease feelings of loneliness.

## 2. Making connections

If people don't always respond to you, try not to take it personally. You're making a conscious effort to connect with other people, but they could have their mind on other things. Maybe they've had a bad day or are very busy. If one person does not respond to you, don't shy away from everyone. The more opportunities you take to smile or say hello, the more likely you are to get a positive response.



## Using the internet to connect with others

There are many ways to stay in touch these days, even if you find it hard to leave your home. Phone calls can be a good way to catch up. If it's hard to find a good time to ring people, try emailing or sending a text message or letter instead. If you've lost touch with old friends, a social networking site like Facebook could help you to reconnect.

When you've become socially isolated, for whatever reason, it can be hard to contact people again. Finding a way to communicate that works for you can help nudge you back into the habit of staying in touch.

Online forums can be a great way to get in touch with people with similar interests – for example, Gransnet is a social networking site for over-50s (**gransnet.com**). There are discussions on everything from genealogy to cooking and biscuit dunking. You don't have to be a grandparent to join in.

Most forums will have rules and advice about how to use them safely. Be careful when talking to strangers online.

## 2. Making connections

You can use the internet to make new friends. Websites like **meetup.com** let you search for and contact people with similar interests in your area. If you plan to meet up with a friend you've made online, make sure you stay safe.



We offer some useful tips at **[independantage.org/get-advice/staying-safe/internet-safety](https://independantage.org/get-advice/staying-safe/internet-safety)**.

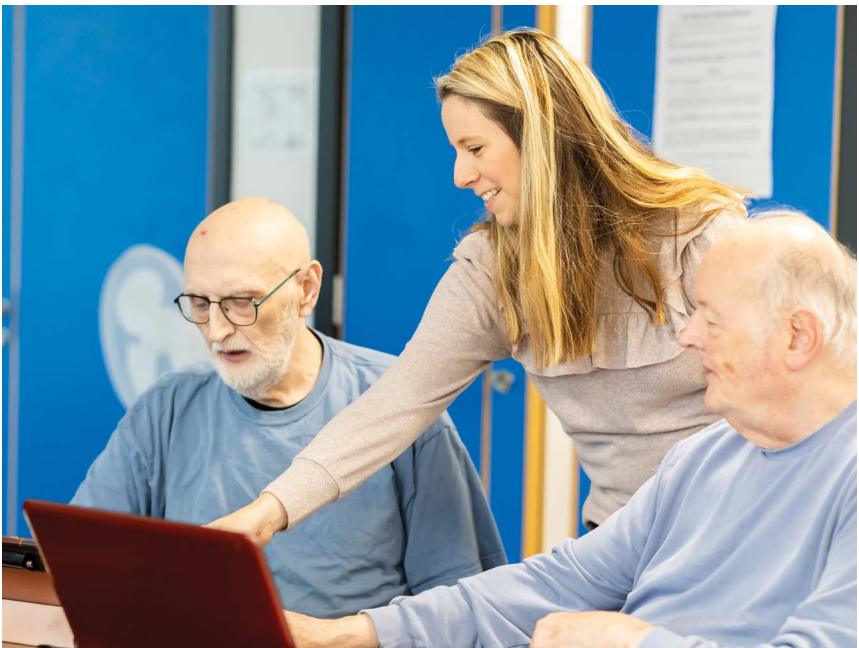
### Getting technical support

If you're not a confident internet user, you can get support.

- AbilityNet have a free technical support helpline for older and disabled people (**0300 180 0028, [abilitynet.org.uk](https://abilitynet.org.uk)**).
- Vodafone's free Hi Digital platform has courses on a variety of things, including getting started online and using a smartphone (**[independantage.org/hidigital](https://independantage.org/hidigital)**).

- Find free or low-cost local courses through the Digital Inclusion Network (**0114 349 1666**, **[goodthingsfoundation.org/find-support/map](https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/find-support/map)**).
- Your local library may run courses.

If what you'd really like is face-to-face contact, try to arrange that instead. It's important to get the type of social contact that will help you feel better.





### 3. Overcoming barriers

There are many reasons why you may find it difficult to connect with people in the way you want to.



If you're finding it difficult to get the social contact you'd like, this might be because of how you're feeling, but it could also be because of the practical problems of getting out and about.

It's worth thinking about what's stopping you – you may find help is available to get round these difficulties. Here are some examples.

### **I've given up driving. How can I get around?**

You could see if your area has a Dial-a-Ride scheme, which offers door-to-door transport to people who can't use public transport. Contact your local council or the Community Transport Association (**0161 351 1475**, [ctauk.org/find-ct-provider](http://ctauk.org/find-ct-provider)) to find out what is available in your area.

If you can use public transport, make sure you take advantage of discounts for over-60s – for example, you could buy a Senior Railcard or Coachcard for a third off most train or coach journeys.

Remember to claim your free bus pass once you reach the qualifying age. Visit [gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass](http://gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass) or ask your local council.

### 3. Overcoming barriers

#### I don't have the money to go out with my friends.

If you are living on a low income, it can be harder to do the things that might make you feel less lonely, like having coffee with a friend or joining a social club. Make sure you're claiming all the benefits that you're entitled to.

Pension Credit is one benefit that is very under-claimed. You can call the Pension Service on **0800 99 1234** to check if you qualify. Use our online benefits calculator ([independentage.org/benefits-calculator](https://independentage.org/benefits-calculator)) or call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** for a full benefits check.



Our free guide **Moneywise** has lots of tips on boosting your income.

Going out doesn't have to be expensive – community groups and charities may offer free events near you. Remember to ask about age-related discounts when you go to the theatre or cinema, for example.

## I live in an isolated or rural area.

If you live in an area where there are fewer things to do, you could try online groups instead. For example, Royal Voluntary Service have a Virtual Village Hall where you can take part in online sessions about arts and crafts, cooking, gardening and more ([virtualvillagehall.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](https://virtualvillagehall.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)).

There is more information about how to connect with others online on **page 11**.



If you find it difficult to get out and about, our factsheet **Help with getting around** has information about accessible travel, community transport and help with travel costs.

“ It’s so important to wake up and think, ‘I’m going to do this or that today.’ ”

### 3. Overcoming barriers

#### **My partner needs 24-hour care. I just can't leave the house.**

Caring for someone can be very isolating. Ask your local council for a free carer's assessment as soon as possible. The council must carry this out for anyone who is an unpaid carer for a relative or friend.

The assessment looks at what support you need in your caring role and how you can get it.



Our free guide **Caring for someone** has more details, or you can call our Helpline for advice (**0800 319 6789**).

Carer support groups can also be a great source of help – see **page 20**.

“ I know how important it is to ask for help... I find you only have to ask and you get assistance in different ways.

## Your physical health

Loneliness and isolation can affect your health, so make sure you're looking after yourself.

Eating healthily, getting enough sleep and being active can all have a positive effect on your outlook and your physical health. Try to avoid drinking too much alcohol, because this might end up making you feel worse. You could use a journal – see **page 6** – to keep track of what you do and what you eat, and the effect this has on how you feel.

Being unwell, particularly with a long-term illness, can lead to isolation. You may have a disability that makes it hard for you to get out. Or you may think that others don't understand how you're feeling or what you're capable of.



Our free guide **Living well with long-term health conditions** has more information about where to get support.

### 3. Overcoming barriers

There are many support groups for people affected by illnesses or conditions. They can be an important source of encouragement and support. Here are some examples.

- The British Heart Foundation run Heart Support Groups for anyone who has been affected by heart disease. These groups run in England and Wales (**0300 330 3322**, [bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/heart-support-groups](https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/heart-support-groups)).
- Carers UK offer support if you're caring for someone (**0808 808 7777**, [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)).
- Glaucoma UK run support groups for people affected by glaucoma to share information and experiences (**01233 64 81 70**, [glaucoma.uk/care-support/support-groups](https://www.glaucoma.uk/care-support/support-groups)).
- Hearing Link Services have a list of groups for people affected by hearing loss (call or text **01844 348111**, [hearinglink.org/connect/groups-clubs-people-hearing-loss](https://www.hearinglink.org/connect/groups-clubs-people-hearing-loss)).
- Mind offer support for anyone with mental health concerns (**0300 123 3393**, [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)). They also have an online community called Side by Side, for people to talk about their lives and help others ([sidebyside.mind.org.uk](https://sidebyside.mind.org.uk)).

- Parkinson's UK support people affected by Parkinson's disease (**0808 800 0303**, **parkinsons.org.uk**).
- The Stroke Association have local support groups for people affected by stroke (**0303 3033 100**, **stroke.org.uk/stroke/support/groups**).
- Macmillan support people affected by cancer (**0808 808 00 00**, **macmillan.org.uk**).
- Macular Society run local support groups for those with macular disease as well as their family and friends (**0300 3030 111**, **macularsociety.org/support/support-group/local-groups**).





## 4. Trying something new

Sometimes, the easiest way to break the cycle of loneliness is to meet new people.



If you're trying to find new friends that you have more in common with, you could join a group based on an interest, hobby or identity, such as:

- a local choir or orchestra
- a painting or drawing class
- a community gardening group
- a walking or swimming group
- a reading group
- a dance or tai chi class
- an LGBTQ+ group
- services or groups at a place of worship.

One advantage of joining a group based around an activity is that there may be less pressure to speak to people immediately. Some groups might let you sit in on a meeting before you join.

## 4. Trying something new

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

- Your local Age UK (**0800 169 6565**, [ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/social-groups](https://ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/social-groups)) may run social events, lunch clubs or exercise groups for older people. They can direct you to local activities you could join too. Age UK also works with friendship centres that organise their own activities, such as lunches, outings, walks and bowling.



- Book clubs are run by some local libraries and The Reading Agency (**0207 324 5153**, **readingfriends.org.uk**). Some focus on certain genres, such as crime fiction or science fiction. Contact your local library (**gov.uk/local-library-services**) or The Reading Agency to find out what they have on offer.
- The English Bridge Union (**01296 317200**, **ebu.co.uk**), Welsh Bridge Union (**welshbridgeunion.org**) and Scottish Bridge Union (**sbu.org.uk**) can help you find a local bridge club, whether you're an enthusiastic beginner or more experienced.
- Making Music (**020 7939 6030**, **makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list**) can connect you to amateur music groups across the UK, including choirs, orchestras and local festivals.
- Men's Sheds Association (**0300 772 9626**, **menssheds.org.uk**) provide a place for men to meet new friends and work on practical projects – such as woodworking, repairing and restoring, and electronics – in a friendly, supportive environment. Contact them to find out if there's one in your area.

 You need to have things to look forward to.

## 4. Trying something new

- Ramblers Wellbeing Walks (**020 3961 3232**, **ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks**) provide free 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. They are led by a trained volunteer and are open to all, no matter your age, ability or health conditions.

Wellbeing Walks are currently only offered in England, but Ramblers Scotland (**0131 357 5850**, **ramblers.org.uk/scotland**) and Ramblers Wales (**020 3961 3310**, **ramblers.org.uk/wales**) also provide information about walks to members. Visit their websites to find out how to join.

- Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline (**0800 0119 100**, **switchboard.lgbt**) can provide details of local social and support groups for people who identify with the community. You can also call them to talk about anything on your mind.
- Thrive (**0118 988 5688**, **thrive.org.uk**) run gardening programmes for people who are isolated or have disabilities, including sight or hearing loss, or dementia. They have three regional centres and run community projects. They can also put you in touch with garden projects in your local area.

- UK Handknitting Association (**ukhandknitting.com**) have information about knitting groups and events for beginners and experienced knitters, as well as crocheters.
- The Women's Institute (WI) (**020 7371 9300**, **thewi.org.uk**) run interesting events and activities for women to learn about arts and crafts, science, sports and leisure in England and Wales. You can visit local groups to find one that's right for you before you pay to become a member. If you live in Scotland, get in touch with the Scottish Women's Institute to find out about events in your community (**0131 225 1724**, **theswi.org.uk**).



## 4. Trying something new

- If you'd like to learn or try something new, the University of the Third Age (U3A) have local centres in many areas. These centres offer a wide range of free or low-cost clubs and classes for older people (**020 8466 6139**, **u3a.org.uk**).
- You could also search online for courses at **findcourses.co.uk**. Although these aren't free, there may be discounts for older people.

Joining a group that keeps you active can be particularly helpful. Exercise can boost your mood as well as keep you in good health, and regular weekly classes are a good way to meet new people. Ask your GP about local fitness classes for older people. There are plenty of other ways to meet people and stay active – for example, see information about Ramblers Wellbeing Walks on **page 26**.

## What's happening in your area?

There may be community events like village fayres or talks offered by your local library that you can get involved with. Your local council should have details of upcoming events.

Day centres or community centres run by a local council or charity may offer you an opportunity to socialise. They're usually aimed at particular groups that might benefit from these services, such as older people, people with dementia or people from a particular cultural group. The activities these centres provide can include lunch clubs, arts and crafts, or practical services like hairdressing and foot care. Check with your council ([gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council)) to find out what's available.

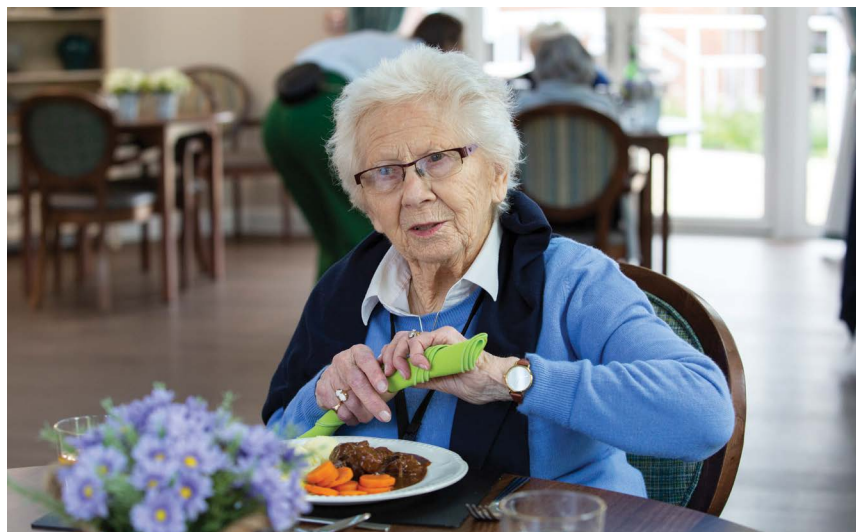
“ Many venues, such as churches, music schools, cathedrals or universities, have free lunchtime concerts. They can be a good way to meet people.

## 4. Trying something new

### Lunch clubs

Lunch clubs provide a welcoming space where you can meet older people in your community and enjoy a home-cooked meal. Lunch clubs in your area may be run by:

- your local council
- Age UK (**0800 169 6565**, [ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area](https://ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area))
- Royal Voluntary Service (**0330 555 0310**, [royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services](https://royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services))
- churches, synagogues or mosques.





## Other social activities

Charities such as Royal Voluntary Service (**0330 555 0310**, [royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services/social-activities](https://royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services/social-activities)) and Age UK (**0800 678 1602**, [ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/social-activities](https://ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/social-activities)) may offer other activities you'd enjoy. Contact them to find out what's available in your area.



Take any new experiences at a pace that suits you. You may have to try a few things before you find one that you like, and it can take time to build trust with any new people you meet.



That was the start – through the coffee morning. I felt like for the first time in 20 years I'd actually laughed! I had a smile. And I thought, this is brilliant.

## 4. Trying something new

### Support to build your confidence

If you feel you need some practical and emotional support to make the most of the opportunities in your community, there are organisations that can help.

British Red Cross can offer short-term support to help you build your confidence, explore new interests and meet people. Call the support line on **03448 711 111** or visit **[redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-with-loneliness](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-with-loneliness)** to find support in your area.

In Scotland, the Connecting With You service provides support over the phone, online and in person. Call them on **0300 30 36 077**.



## 5. Helping others

Some people find that their loneliness comes from feeling that they're not needed. Choosing to do something that makes a difference can show you that's not true and help you feel less isolated.

## 5. Helping others

### Volunteering

Volunteering works both ways – you're helping other people or a cause you care about, but you can get a lot from it too. Most volunteers find giving their time very rewarding, and it can be a great way to meet other people with similar interests.

Have a look for volunteering opportunities in your area – many of them won't require specific skills. Here are some examples.

“ I started volunteering as I was keen to give something back, and it has done this and more, enriching my life through the experience.

- **doit.life** is a good place to search for local opportunities if you're online.
- Contact your nearest NCVO Volunteer Centre (**020 7713 6161**, [ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities](https://ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities)) to find out about volunteering opportunities in your area. If you live in Wales, contact WCVA (**0300 111 0124**, [wcva.cymru](https://wcva.cymru)). In Scotland, reach out to SCVO (**0800 169 0022**, [scvo.scot](https://scvo.scot)).
- Re-engage host afternoon tea parties for over-75s. They need volunteer drivers and hosts – and you could also sign up as a guest (**0800 716543**, [reengage.org.uk](https://reengage.org.uk)).
- Volunteering Matters can help you find ways to use your skills and experience in the community (**020 3780 5870**, [volunteeringmatters.org.uk/volunteering](https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/volunteering)).
- Visit the RSPCA for information on volunteering at animal rescue centres ([rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/volunteer](https://rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/volunteer)).

## 5. Helping others

### Homeshare

If you live alone and have a spare room, you could consider contacting Homeshare UK (**0151 227 3499**, **homeshareuk.org**). The scheme matches you with someone who needs affordable housing. They would keep you company and may also help around the home.





## 6. Partners and loneliness

For some people, the loss or lack of a partner can be difficult to cope with.

## 6. Partners and loneliness

Even if you have a strong network of friends and family, you may find that you miss being part of a couple. This can be very hard, especially if you've lost a partner and are adjusting to spending more time on your own.

You may want to put all your energy into finding someone new – however, it can help to focus on other aspects of your life too.

Learning to be alone, and developing other interests and supportive relationships, can help you to feel less lonely and increase your sense of self-worth, whether or not you're looking for a partner.

“ I was widowed many years ago. My problem, really, is a feeling of redundancy. I have a good relationship with my three children and six grandchildren but, in some ways, it would be unhealthy if they still needed me. I am not shy and am happy in a group but that is not what I need. I just want one person to care about and who cares about me.





Domestic abuse can be a cause of loneliness. Visit our webpage Protecting someone from harm for more information ([independentage.org/get-advice/family-friends-carers/help-someone-youre-worried-about/protecting-someone-from-harm](https://independentage.org/get-advice/family-friends-carers/help-someone-youre-worried-about/protecting-someone-from-harm)).

## Coping with grief and loss

If you've lost a partner, it's normal to feel lonely when grieving. Give yourself time to come to terms with what has happened and how you're feeling. Grief causes many different feelings and may stay with you for a long time.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, Cruse Bereavement Care may be able to help (**0808 808 1677**, [cruse.org.uk/get-support](https://cruse.org.uk/get-support)).



Our free guide **Coping with bereavement** has more advice on living with grief and loss.

## 6. Partners and loneliness

### Separation and divorce

While divorce may be the best outcome when a relationship breaks down, it can also lead to loneliness. You may have lost some of your social networks, your relationships with your children may be affected and there can be a financial cost as well.

It can take time to work through the issues that come with divorce and it may be helpful to talk to someone. If you live in England and Wales, an organisation such as Relate can help (**relate.org.uk**). If you live in Scotland, contact Relationships Scotland (**0345 119 2020, relationships-scotland.org.uk**).



## New relationships

If you feel ready to start a new relationship, there are many ways to meet new people. Building close relationships can take time, so don't be disappointed if it doesn't happen immediately.

If the idea of meeting someone new feels daunting, you might want to start by taking up a new hobby or activity. Joining a group activity would let you spend time with others and get to know them at a pace that suits you.

Some people try online dating. This can be very convenient and is usually safe – but be careful when giving out personal information or arranging to meet people for the first time. Mind, the mental health charity, have advice on staying safe online and having healthy online relationships (**0300 123 3393**, **[mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/online-mental-health/online-relationships](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/online-mental-health/online-relationships)**).



## 7. Learning to be alone

If you're feeling lonely, you may try to avoid spending time alone. However, being on your own is not the same as being lonely.

Learning to feel comfortable with your own company can help you to feel less lonely, even when you don't have others around you.

Spending time apart from others can be a liberating experience. You can use it to do things you enjoy, learn a new skill or indulge an interest your friends don't share.

## **Focus on yourself**

Sometimes we compare ourselves to others and worry that we have a lonelier life than those around us. One of the drawbacks of social media, such as Facebook, is that we seem to have a constant window into other people's lives. You may see pictures of people surrounded by friends and family, but this doesn't show the full picture – people often only share the positive parts of their lives.

Try to focus on yourself and how you are feeling. Not everyone needs the same number of friends or type of social contact.

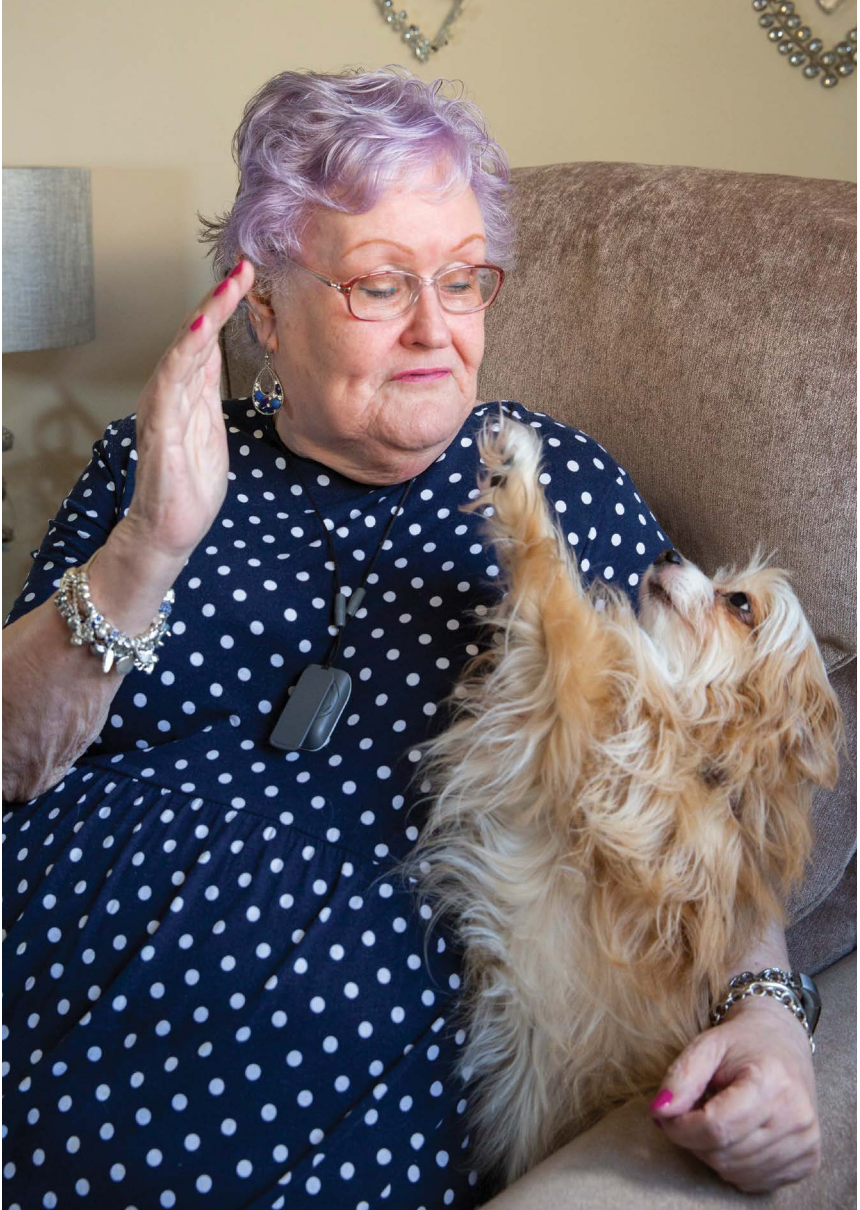
## 7. Learning to be alone

### Company from a pet

If you want more companionship at home, you could consider getting a pet. Pets can provide unconditional love and company, and many people find them comforting.

If you wouldn't be able to keep your own dog, you could help someone out by walking or looking after their dog through organisations like The Cinnamon Trust (**01736 757 900**, [cinnamon.org.uk](http://cinnamon.org.uk)) or Borrow My Doggy (**020 3826 8628**, [borrowmydoggy.com](http://borrowmydoggy.com)).

“ Getting a dog was the best thing I did when I retired – I have to go out every day for a walk and going out at the same time each day means I get to know other dog walkers who walk at the same time as I do. It's amazing how many people I've got to know.





## 8. If you're struggling

When you're lonely, especially if you've been feeling that way for a while, it can be hard to reach out. You might worry that others won't understand you or want to spend time with you.



Sometimes, you may need to address underlying feelings and anxieties before trying to spend more time with others. Otherwise, simply increasing the amount of social contact you have may not change how you feel.

If your confidence is low, spending time with other people can be particularly difficult.

Try to challenge negative thoughts and remember to be kind to yourself.

“ I live entirely alone; I have no family. That takes a lot of thinking about, doesn't it – I am entirely alone. Life is really what I make it.

## 8. If you're struggling

### Self-help

If you're feeling bad about yourself or anxious about how to change things, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) could help. This teaches you to break negative or unhelpful thought patterns. It can help you to challenge assumptions like "No one will want to talk to me" or "I've been lonely for so long – nothing will change".

There are many self-help books and online resources available that use this approach.

You could try:

- the Overcoming series of self-help books, recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Books include Overcoming Anxiety and Overcoming Low Self-Esteem. See [nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/self-help-therapies](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/self-help-therapies) for more information. You can also find these books in libraries and bookshops
- the online mood self-assessment tool on the NHS site ([checkwellbeing.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk](https://checkwellbeing.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk)). There is also lots of advice about how to deal with common mental health concerns, like low mood, low confidence and anxiety.

## Emotional support

Self-help isn't right for everyone. If you're feeling very anxious or depressed, or struggling to control your feelings of loneliness, talk to your GP. They may refer you to an NHS counselling service. If you live in England or Scotland, you can also refer yourself.

- In England: [nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/find-nhs-talking-therapies](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/find-nhs-talking-therapies).
- In Scotland: [nhsinform.scot/tests-and-treatments/counselling-and-therapies](https://www.nhsinform.scot/tests-and-treatments/counselling-and-therapies).

You could also call a helpline like Samaritans (**116 123**) to talk about what's worrying you. The Silver Line (**0800 4 70 80 90**, [thesilverline.org.uk](https://www.thesilverline.org.uk)) is a helpline specifically for older people, providing emotional support and advice.



Although loneliness and depression are distinct experiences, the two are linked. One can lead to the other.

Our guide **Managing anxiety and depression** has more information about where to go for help and how you can help yourself stay mentally well.



## Denis's story

I'm 69 and living in a flat where I've lived for the last 40 years. I've always been single. I worked in offices and retired in my late 50s.

Just after the first lockdown ended, I was feeling very lonely. I didn't expect to see anyone during lockdown, but when it was over other people seemed to be getting their social life back again. That highlighted the fact that I had no social life. I didn't have anywhere I felt comfortable socialising.

When I talk through a problem it's less overwhelming. It helps me get things into perspective. And if I have good news, it's nice to have someone to share it with. It's really nice to be able to talk about what I want to talk about.

After chatting to the Independent Age Helpline, I joined an indoor bowls club, I've been to coffee mornings and I go to a lunch club and a music therapy group. I'm now meeting people face to face, four days a week.

I feel less lonely than I did. I suffer from anxiety and depression, but my mood has improved.

“ When I talk through a problem it's less overwhelming. It helps me get things into perspective.

# Checklist

Keep a journal to record your feelings and set yourself simple targets – see **chapter 1**.

If you're living with a long-term health condition, contact a support organisation to get in touch with people with similar experiences – see **chapter 3**.

Find out if there are any benefits you could claim to boost your income – see **chapter 3**.

Look for ways to improve your physical health and wellbeing – see **chapter 4**.

Try something new such as a course, a hobby or getting online – see **chapter 4**.

Volunteer, or ask for a volunteer to support you – see **chapter 5**.

If you're struggling, you may want to try using self-help books and resources to change your thinking, or speak to your GP – see **chapter 8**.



“ I love to talk to people and I like to have a laugh. Chatting to people is what life is all about.

## About Independent Age

No one should face financial hardship in later life.

Independent Age is the national charity focused on improving the lives of older people facing financial hardship. We offer free impartial advice and information on what matters most: money, housing and care.

We financially support local community organisations across the UK through our grants programme. We campaign for change for older people struggling with their finances.

You can call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm) or email **helpline@independentage.org** to arrange to speak to one of our advisers.

To donate or help support our work, please visit **independentage.org/support-us**.



Independent Age  
18 Avonmore Road  
London  
W14 8RR

charity@independentage.org  
Helpline 0800 319 6789

**independentage.org**



© Independent Age 2024

Independent Age is the operating name of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association.  
Registered charity number 210729 (England and Wales) SC047184 (Scotland).