Tips on how to reduce loneliness in later life

Mental Health
Foundation

<u>Mental Health Foundation</u> 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 <u>Mental Health Awareness Week</u> – 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 in local and national initiatives to reduce loneliness.

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Loneliness in later life

Loneliness can affect people of all ages. As we get older, we can be presented with many challenges in our lives that can lead to loneliness. A loss of a partner, family, or friends. We may retire, become ill or move into different accommodation.

Whatever the challenge, it can be difficult to find a solution, make new meaningful connections and cope with the loneliness you are experiencing.

The Mental Health Foundation has created the following tips as a source to help people reduce their loneliness.

People in later life helped create these tips through various focus groups held by the Mental Health Foundation.

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Find a green/blue space

If you can, try to spend time visiting natural places – green spaces like parks, gardens or forests – or blue spaces like the beach, rivers and <u>wetlands</u>. This can help you reduce your risk of mental health problems, lift your mood and help you feel better about things. If it feels difficult to get outside, try going with a friend or relative, or picking somewhere familiar. If it's not possible to get outside, you could try watching nature programmes, observing the world from your window and spotting examples of nature even in urban environments is good for your wellbeing.

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Connect online

Getting online can be a great way to stay in touch with family and friends. It can be a bit difficult for some people because of a lack of digital skills, actually getting connected, or a fear of using digital devices. There are organisations out there that help people in later life to get onto the internet. You could also try your local library for internet facilities. Age UK has some useful information, and the government website can help you find internet access in your local library. Studies have shown that the effect of loneliness diminishes for internet users.

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Exercise

Walking, dancing, <u>chair exercise</u> or swimming. Exercise has been linked to positive changes both physically and mentally. It will reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Exercising doesn't have to be long even short amounts will help us feel more energised. When you feel better and have more energy this will put us in a positive position to broaden our social networks.

#IveBeenThere

Social Groups

Joining coffee mornings, group lunches and activity groups that meet in person can help create connections and build relationships with others. There is also the opportunity to do these activities online if face-to-face meetings are difficult.

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Take up a Hobby

Finding a hobby can be a great way of learning new skills, finding enjoyment, and connecting with others. From gardening, board games, walking clubs and being creative, hobbies have the potential for you to meet other people with the same interests.

Start or keep learning

Learning is one of the main recommendations of the NHS's 5 steps to mental wellbeing. Offering a platform to learn through adult education classes, the University of the Third Age (U3A) provides lots of topics. Hosting sessions online or in-person, events are held across the UK.

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Volunteer

Volunteering to meet others, share experiences and do something purposeful is a good way to help reduce loneliness. Have a look at the government's website for more information about how to get involved.
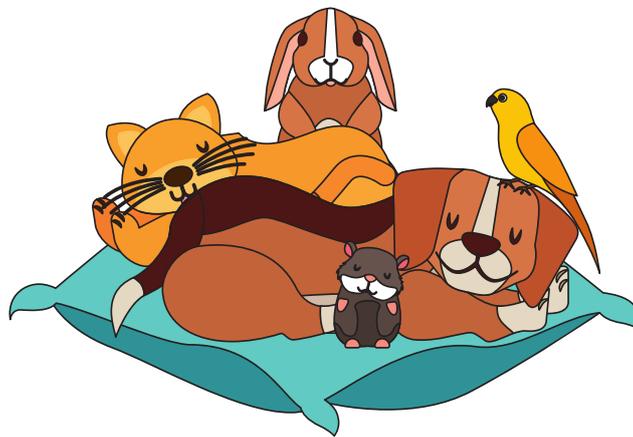
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Pet Companionship

A pet's companionship is a great way to reduce anxiety and stress. They can be a wonderful source of comfort, companionship and motivation. And in many ways, pets can help us live mentally healthier lives.

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Find a Routine

Our daily routines can help us keep structure and stay focused on the day ahead. You could try to plan out each day with small things that can help you stay active, physically and mentally. Routines can also help us reduce stress, anxiety and boredom.

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It's good to talk

Talking with someone for the first time can be difficult and it may take time to feel at ease and to open up about your experiences. Finding the right person or service in your area has become easier with <u>Hub of Hope</u>. This is a database of local mental health support services that are available just by using your postcode.

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