



16 July 2020 (2nd edition)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Supporting Residents in Retirement Housing and Extra Care Housing who experience Loneliness

An A-Z of examples

A Housing LIN Practice Briefing (No6)

About this briefing

During the recent Loneliness Awareness Week 2020 (15-21 June), there were many examples shared on social media and in the press of how residents in retirement/sheltered and extra care housing are experiencing loneliness and isolation and how this having an effect on their mental health and wellbeing.

Compiled by a consortia of organisations led by the Retirement Housing Group and the Housing LIN, this briefing highlights how the retirement/sheltered housing and extra care housing sector is working closely with “extremely vulnerable” residents. In particular, it captures an A-Z of creative ways in which operators have organised activities to combat loneliness and foster greater connectedness amongst residents within schemes and/or the wider community, including acts of immense acts of kindness. It also provides a selection of examples of activities that others may find useful and may want to try out too.

And, if you find this briefing of interest, check out the Housing LIN’s dedicated resources on combatting loneliness and reducing isolation at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/loneliness-and-isolation/>

Current Government advice

It is now over 15 weeks since lockdown began and, for over 2 million predominantly older people in England who are classed as “extremely vulnerable”, this has been a very long 4 months.

On Tuesday, 7 July 2020, the Government advised that millions of people who are ‘shielding’ no longer need to socially distance from people they live with and are now able to spend some time in open spaces outside with up to 6 people, including people from other households¹. People can now also form a ‘support bubble’ with one other household - although one of the households in the ‘support bubble’ should be a single adult household (either an adult living alone or with children under 18 only) - and can spend time together outside and inside each other’s homes, including overnight, without needing to socially distance.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Furthermore, the Government shielding support package will remain in place until the end of July when people will no longer be advised to shield. Individuals had until 17th July to register as a clinically extremely vulnerable person².

Despite these, for many people, such a long period of isolation, alone or with one companion, has led to increasing stress, anxiety and loneliness.

Who is classified as “clinically extremely vulnerable”?

Older people who are considered “clinically extremely vulnerable” include:

- people who've received solid organ transplants
- people with severe respiratory conditions including severe asthma and severe COPD
- people with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections
- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer, or who have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- people having immune therapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer or people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system
- people with kidney disease.

The list does not include people with dementia³ but they may have other health conditions which might mean that they are “clinically extremely vulnerable”. For more information about who has been classed as “clinically extremely vulnerable”, please visit the NHS Digital website to view the ‘Shielded patients list’.⁴

From 1 August, the government will be advising that shielding will be paused. From this date, the government is advising you to adopt strict social distancing rather than full shielding measures. Strict social distancing means you may wish to go out to more places and see more people but you should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household or ‘support bubble’. For those people who are shielding, if they decide to spend some time outside there are steps they can take to help protect themselves. Age UK advise⁵:

- **Personal hygiene:** Carry on washing your hands with soap and warm water when you return to their home. Carry hand sanitizer and try to avoid touching your face or eyes while you are out. And do not share personal belongings with others; for example, cups or cutlery.
- **Meeting up with others:** Meet with up to five other people from different households in an outdoor space, such as in a park or private garden. You are able to gather in groups of more than 6 if you are all from a single household or support bubble, or if the group is only made up of two separate households. When doing this you should aim to stay at least two metres away from those not in your household or ‘support bubble’. If this is not possible, you should follow the 1-metre rule, which means staying at least 1 metre away while taking additional precautions, such as wearing a face covering.

² <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

³ <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Tips-for-the-housing-sector-on-supporting-someone-affected-by-dementia/>

⁴ <https://digital.nhs.uk/coronavirus/shielded-patient-list>

⁵ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/coronavirus-guidance/social-distancing-and-self-isolation/>

- And single-adult households in England can join up with one other household to create a 'support bubble'. This applies to both people living alone and single parents with children under the age of 18 at home. Being in a 'support bubble' with another household means that you can spend time with each other in inside spaces, without needing to keep your distance. People who are classed as "clinically extremely vulnerable" have been able to form a 'support bubble' from 6 July. For more information on what constitutes a 'support bubble', visit Age UK's dedicated webpage⁶.
- Meet in indoor spaces with people from one other household at a time, who you are not in a support bubble with, so long as you socially distance (try to stay at least two metres) from each other. This could be in places such as pubs or restaurants, or at one another's houses. You should not be in indoor spaces with others if you aren't able to socially distance: for example, you should not travel in a car with anyone outside of your household or 'support bubble'. If you do meet in an indoor space, make sure that it is well-ventilated and open windows to let in fresh air.
- And although you can meet up with different households inside, you must only meet up with one household at a time. This is because the more people who are together, the greater the risk of coronavirus spreading. If you are in a 'support bubble', then they count as your household, and you can meet up indoors with your support bubble plus one additional household.
- When staying overnight away from your home, either with your own household or support bubble, or one other household, you will need to socially distance from anyone who is not part of your household or support bubble.
- Social distancing: When you are outside you should comply with the 1-metre rule, which means staying at least 1 metre away while taking additional precautions, such as wearing a face covering.
- Leaving home: Meet up with people outdoors, as the risk of transmission is lower outside than inside. If you do meet up with people outside of your household in an indoor space, it is best to do so in larger, well-ventilated places. If you go to other people's houses or have people to yours, open windows to let air in. Also, limit the number of people that you spend time with from outside of your household or support bubble as the more people you come into contact with the higher the risk of transmission.
- And avoid visiting places which are likely to be busy or where it will be difficult for you keep your distance from others. You could try going at times when they are likely to be quieter, such as in the morning or during the weekday.
- You can now visit some businesses which have previously been closed, such as pubs, restaurants and hairdressers. There is guidance as to how businesses should operate to keep their customers and employees safe and you should check with individual businesses as to the steps you might need to take to visit. For example, some supermarkets have protected hours available for people who are more vulnerable.
- And, as reported by the BBC, from 24 July, it will be compulsory to wear a facemask in shops in England⁷.
- Exercise: Government guidance is to remain "stay alert". Try to limit the amount of time you spend outside; for example, by only going out once a day. You should also maintain strict social distancing.

⁶ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/coronavirus-guidance/support-bubbles/>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-53397617>

- Visitors: Only essential visitors, such as carers or NHS staff, should be coming into your home unless you are in a ‘support bubble’. Then you can continue to see each other without needing to maintain social distancing. However, it is best to be diligent about social distancing and personal hygiene, such as handwashing.

For people not classified “clinically extremely vulnerable”

For people who are not “clinically extremely vulnerable”, they should currently observe ‘social distancing’ measures and only leave their home for limited purposes. The Government announced that these changed from Friday, 4 July 2020. In particular, social distancing need only mean a distance of “one metre plus”⁸. However, the present rules are:

- *Shopping*: To go to shops that are allowed to be open to buy things like food and medicine or to collect items they have ordered over the phone or online, as long as they maintain social distancing measures.
- *Leisure activities*: From 11 July, the guidance states you will be able to play some team sports if formally organised by your sports’ governing body. Informal sports gatherings are restricted to 30 people. From 13 July, close contact services, such as nail bars, salons, tanning booths, spas, massage parlours, tattoo parlours and body piercing studios, can open. And from 25 July, sports facilities and venues, including such as indoor gyms, fitness and dance studios, indoor swimming pools and indoor water parks, will open – subject to evidence closer to the time. However, note large gatherings or mass events should not be taking place due to the substantial transmission risk with crowd behaviour⁹.
- *Travelling to and from work*: From 1 August, those who need to work and cannot do so from home will be able to return to work as long as their workplace is COVID secure, adhering to the guidance available¹⁰. You can also travel irrespective of distance, but you should take hygiene and safety precautions if using services on the way. You should continue to avoid using public transport and should cycle, walk or drive wherever possible. Note, it is a legal requirement to wear a face covering on public transport

How are operators responding?

Unlike a residential care home, the 800,000 people living in retirement/sheltered housing schemes or extra care housing developments, have the security of their own front door and the ability to cook and clean for themselves, thus remaining in isolation but, at the same time, help is at hand with practical tasks such as booking medical appointments, keeping the building functioning and helping residents remain occupied and engaged. Many residents either also organise and pay for care themselves or have been assessed for planned care, assessed by their local adult social care teams.

Through *Local Resilience Forums* the sector is doing everything it can to deal with the practical needs of these most vulnerable people at this difficult time. But, more can be done by all of us within the wider community doing what we can to engage with and support vulnerable neighbours and friends. This could be as simple as:

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-people-from-outside-your-household-from-4-july>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

- Giving an elderly neighbour a share of your fresh baked casserole or cake – leaving it at the front door
- Potting up and passing on cuttings from your garden
- Offering to help put out refuse bins or mow lawns
- Passing on magazines or jigsaws when you have finished with them
- Offering to phone essential services for deaf people without the internet who need a repeat prescription or to book a sight test.
- Making a weekly phone call to say how are you?

There are many excellent examples of community engagement and activities that have been developed, both in person and virtually through greater digital connectedness, to support “extremely vulnerable” residents in retirement housing and extra care housing. With this in mind, and as social distancing eases, some imaginative types of activity are listed in the following A-Z, collated below.

An A-Z of activities

A = Art

Setting up online art projects to connect with painting and drawings, or making a picture library or creating a photo diary.

B = Buddy programme

Establishing a Buddy system or Befriending Service to ensure every resident has a point of contact who can provide them with essential food and medical supplies, as well as any other support, when needed.

C = Community Circles

Supporting residents to participate in ‘lockdown friendly’ activities to keep everyone motivated and entertained.

D = Doorstep Disco

Hold a weekly event with residents and staff on people doorsteps or a scheme’s garden. Another possibility is Doorstep or Window Bingo using a loudspeaker to ensure that everyone can hear numbers as they are called.

E = Exercise

Holding Keep Fit sessions. From aerobics classes to balcony waves so that residents can join in from the safety of their balconies or terraces.

F = Food

Preparing TLC meal bags or organising a Fish and Chip evening.

G = Green Fingers

Encouraging gardening, creating a vegetable patch, a window box or raised beds to grow vegetables, fruit or flowers.

H = Helplines

Signposting to helplines such as Samaritans, SilverLine, Let's talk loneliness, The Marmalade Trust, Campaign to End Loneliness. For more information, check out the Housing LIN briefing: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/An-A-Z-of-organisations-and-websites-on-ageing-loneliness-and-social-isolation-A-Housing-LIN-Practice-Briefing/>

I = Internet activities

Giving technical support for residents, including setting up videoconferencing accounts, so they can keep in touch with their friends and families. Or purchasing tablets for every home, meaning residents can now use. *Skype* and *WhatsApp* as a quick and easy way to communicate. Creating *Facebook* groups with pages to keep relatives in the loop and highlight the activities taking place. And making videos - Some schemes have even gone as far as producing their own music videos to put a smile on everyone's face.

J = Jigsaws

Supplying residents with puzzles and other indoor games for single person activities.

K = Knitting and sewing group

Establishing a virtual knitting group, sharing patterns and techniques, including knitting hearts for NHS staff and carers and preparing non-surgical masks for donation to local charities. The Group Leader may be able to organise online purchase of knitting and sewing needles and raw materials.

L = Little shop

Organising a 'pop up' shop, stocked by suppliers and supermarket deliveries.

M = Mirthy Talks

Providing interactive talks by connecting public speakers with the retirement community, allowing them to share interests and passions with their neighbours and the guest speakers.

N = Newsletters

Producing a 'Village Gazette' – which gives residents a forum to exchange news and include their writing, art, photographs of local sights and personal stories.

O = Onsite activities

Organising onsite activities for residents only, provided social distancing is in place.

P = Pen Pals

Setting up a Pen Pal initiative to ensure residents keep connected with the outsider world by sharing letters, pictures, poems and recipes.

Q = Quizzes

Running an online quiz at a scheme or over several developments, with the ability for people to also participate using pen and paper if they'd rather.

R = Reading Groups

Organising an online book club.

S = Singing

Holding sing-a-longs which residents can join in from a safe distance

T = Telecaring

Setting up designated slots each day for residents to 'book in' sessions to call or message their families

U = U3A (University of the 3rd Age)

Signing up to lifelong learning and online education classes.

V = Volunteering

Visiting volunteers offering remote support, from telephone calls to those who or lonely to resident volunteers living on schemes carrying out doorstep drop offs of shopping.

W = Weekly Packs

Producing information to keeping residents informed, entertained and engaged during lockdown; for example, from operational information to tips on how to stay healthy and happy during these challenging periods. Can also include quizzes, jokes and poems.

X = Xbox

Computer Games can be played by all ages, not just teenagers. Frustrated footballers might enjoy online games and there are numerous fantasy worlds to escape into as well as the excitement of watching online tournaments.

Y = YouTube

Recommending live streaming and cultural activities such as plays from the National Theatre, dance, ballet, music etc.

Z = Zoom

Chatting with family and friends with glasses of wine or a 'quarantine' cocktail!

All of the above ideas can help keep a community vibrant. It is necessary to pay attention to the interests of individuals and to provide a range of activities in order to make sure that no one is left out. An activities or community co-ordinator, who may or may not be the scheme manager, has an important role here. This person should also look after the interests of volunteers and make sure no one becomes overstretched or feels that they have no support if their own circumstances change and they are unable to honour existing commitments.

The above list is by no means exhaustive and we welcome further information on activities that residents and/or you may organise on your schemes for future inclusion. Email us at: info@housinglin.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Written by **Kathleen Dunmore**, Retirement Housing Group UK, and **Jeremy Porteus**, Chief Executive, the Housing LIN.

We are also grateful to members of [RHG-UK](#), [ARCO](#), [ARHM](#) and the [HBF Retirement Home Builders Group](#) for sharing suggestions. Also to **Jane Everett**, Community Engagement Officer of West Bridgford Methodist Church, for comments on how activities could be taken out to wider community groups.



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<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HealthandHousing/coronavirus-info-hub/>

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Published by

Housing Learning and Improvement Network
c/o PRP, The Ideas Store
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