



Mental Health  
Foundation



# Mental Health Awareness Week

9-15 May 2022 - Loneliness

Hosted by the Mental Health Foundation

Mental Health Awareness Week is an annual event when there is an opportunity for the whole of the UK to focus on achieving good mental health. The Mental Health Foundation started the event 21 years ago. Each year the Foundation continues 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.



# Why loneliness?



Loneliness is affecting more and more of us in the UK and has had a huge impact on our physical and mental health during the pandemic. Our connection to other people and our community is fundamental to protecting our mental health and we need to find better ways of tackling the epidemic of loneliness. We can all play a part in this.

So, in May 2022, the Mental Health Foundation are raising awareness of the impact of loneliness on our mental wellbeing and the practical steps we can take to address it.

Reducing loneliness is a major step towards a mentally healthy society.

Loneliness is something that we all feel at times but when it is chronic or long-term it can have serious effects on our mental health. We all have a part to play in reducing loneliness.

Loneliness is a normal part of life, with most of us feeling lonely at some point and experiencing how it can gnaw away at our sense of self-worth and belonging.

Loneliness is not about the number of friends we have, the time we spend on our own or something that happens when we reach a certain age. Loneliness is the feeling we experience when there is a mismatch between the social connections we have and those that we need or want. That means it can be different for all of us.

This Mental Health Awareness Week, we want to give loneliness the attention that it deserves, bringing it out from the shadows where it so often is hidden. Research will be released to show the embedded misunderstanding and prejudice around loneliness, and why the length of time we experience loneliness is so vital to its effect on our mental health. We will explore the shame we often feel and how many of us still struggle to talk about loneliness and how it is affecting our mental health.

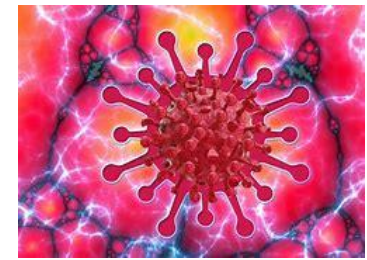
# Loneliness and Mental Health

Loneliness is a significant public health issue. It remains one of the key indicators of poor mental health, our own reports have shown that being connected to other people in a way that helps us feel valued is absolutely fundamental to protecting our mental health. Long-term feelings of loneliness have also been shown to be associated with higher rates of mortality and poorer physical health outcomes.

This was shown most clearly in the well-known Harvard Study<sup>2</sup>, which since 1938 has tracked 268 Harvard undergraduates and their children to explore what makes us who we are, from physical and psychological traits to social life and IQ, to how we flourish. It found that the warmth of our relationships throughout life had the greatest impact on our life satisfaction and health. Loneliness is a significant public health issue. It remains one of the key indicators of poor mental health, our own reports have shown that being connected to other people in a way that helps us feel valued is absolutely fundamental to protecting our mental health. Long-term feelings of loneliness have also been shown<sup>1</sup> to be associated with higher rates of mortality and poorer physical health outcomes.

# The pandemic brought us all closer to loneliness

One of the few consolations of the pandemic is that it reminded us of our need for each other. Our [Mental Health in the Pandemic study](#) showed that Covid-19 brought the experience of loneliness closer to millions of us. **During the lockdowns, we found that loneliness was almost 3 times that of pre-pandemic levels.** Connections with loved ones, friends, family and everyday relationships were disrupted, or in some cases broken.



This loneliness wasn't experienced in the same way across our communities. People with long-term physical conditions, people on lower incomes and people with existing mental health problems were more likely to

experience loneliness compared to the general UK population. Older people's risk of loneliness was influenced by factors like whether they were digitally connected.



The Mental Health Awareness week will be an opportunity to ask vital questions about how we will reduce loneliness as we continue to come out of the pandemic, and live with Covid-19 in a different way. The Mental Health Foundation will be releasing a policy briefing on the action that can be taken by national and local governments in a number of areas of our society to enable more human connection. And they'll be taking those ideas directly to MPs in Westminster during the week, and also making representations to governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.





# Help us bring loneliness into the light

There is so much you can do during the week. Take the chance to get in touch with a friend or neighbour you haven't spoken with in a while. Have a look at and share the Mental Health Foundation podcasts, animation, personal stories, social posts, research, policy asks and tips that they'll be publishing in the week.

Sharing our own stories helps reduce the stigma around loneliness and challenge the stereotypes about who experiences loneliness and how it affects us.

Get involved in **the largest collective sharing of loneliness experiences** and together let's shatter the stigma around loneliness. Share your experiences and send a powerful message to others, using the hashtag: **#IveBeenThere** and **#MentalHealthAwarenessWeek**

We can only make progress on loneliness  
together