

- Loneliness

FEELING LONELY?

What to do when it hurts the most

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Ouch, you're feeling the burn of loneliness. Maybe it's just the season for it – Christmas and the upcoming holidays are common triggers, because of the expectations around “togetherness”. And it can be particularly tough if you're struggling with loss or grief, you're in a relationship that's not working or you don't have close family to share time with.



While it doesn't make the official manuals of psychological disorder, therapists are always scouting for loneliness because of its potential to harm mental health.

Fortunately, most loneliness, and its symptoms, are temporary. But when it digs in over time, it can develop into depression and anxiety, lurk behind addictions, erode self-esteem and trigger physical health problems.

When loneliness bites

Studies indicate up to 75% of us will feel lonely at some point in our lives.

It is often tied to circumstances, such as the end of a relationship, the death of someone close to you or a move to a new city. But it can also strike in unexpected ways – even when you're in a good space.

It can roar up on the back of a significant date, an invitation that reminds you you're on your own (or an exclusion from an event), a reminder from the past or a sadness that your friendships lack meaning.

To feel lonely at times is common and to worry or feel guilty about it is normal. To know many others are going through the same thing may not help in the moment, but it's healthy to acknowledge it.

Here are some strategies to help you when it stings most.

Play some sad-ass songs

Yes, playing upbeat music can help you push through difficult feelings. But sad-ass songs can strike an empathetic chord in a way happyclappy ones can't. You're allowed to cry. Just keep a boundary around how long you do it for.

Nail down your feelings

When life is hard, it's tempting globalise our feelings – to attach more meaning to them than necessary. Feeling lonely doesn't mean or say anything else (negative) about you. Remind yourself that ALL feelings are temporary. Just because you feel lonely today doesn't mean you will feel this way all day, every day. Difficult feelings will pass.

Find someone to download with

Being alone when grappling with a problem can be tough because you spin it around and around in your head, making it seem even bigger. So find one person you can trust with your vulnerability: a friend, a family member, a close colleague, a neighbour, a mentor, a therapist if your budget allows.

Ask them for an hour of their time. Most people won't mind providing a supportive ear when you're in a tough space, especially if you're there for them too. (Just be mindful of how much support you need – unless you're paying them.)

Turn outwards to others, not in to yourself

Don't let yourself go up into your head, pull out the cerebral couch and stay up there.

Overthinking about your situation makes everything worse.

Instead, use your active mind to think of one thing you could do for someone else. Then do it. It will create good feelings – for you both.

Create: make something

Diving fully into a project keeps your hands busy and focuses your thinking on what you're doing, rather than thinking about your loneliness. Get busy.

Measure yourself backwards

When we're feeling low it's tempting to rate yourself against what you haven't got and/ or what you've lost (opportunities or people). Instead, think about what you've already done in your life and what you do have. No matter who you are, you'll find you've done many interesting things – dwell on that for a while.

Do what makes you feel good

Pamper yourself. Read. Walk. Hike. Swim. Stretch. Listen to music. Dance. Watch comedies. Go outside. To take in nature is particularly helpful because it gives some perspective over our (tiny) places in the world.

You may feel lonely right now but being on your own also means you're in great company, with the person who knows you best. Do your best to remember that.