



**THE GREAT
GET
TOGETHER.**

INSPIRED BY JO COX

THE GREAT WINTER GET TOGETHER 2023

No Shame in Sharing toolkit




Welcome

Over the last few years, we have all become more aware of loneliness and the importance of feeling connected with others. But while we all experience loneliness at some points, we don't all feel comfortable talking about it – and that needs to change.

We know January can be a lonely time, and given the cost of living crisis this year it may be more difficult than ever for people to access their normal social spaces. That's why this year we're asking people to create local places of connection; spaces people can go to make the social connections they need. Anyone can create a place of connection – it can be as simple as speaking about loneliness with someone close to you or as complex as running a special Great Winter Get Together event.

If you don't know where to start with talking about loneliness, don't worry! We've got you covered. This toolkit will take you through tips and advice for how to take part in a way that feels right for you. Together, let's show that there's no shame in sharing.



"I will not live in a country where thousands of people are living lonely lives, forgotten by the rest of us."

Jo Cox

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1

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a normal human emotion, signalling a need for more social contact. You don't have to be on your own to feel lonely – especially if you don't feel seen, understood or cared for by the people around you.

Some key factors increase the likelihood of feeling lonely, including:

- Seasonal changes
- Starting university/new jobs
- Moving away from home
- Suffering a bereavement
- Becoming a new parent
- Going through a relationship break-up

People of all ages experience loneliness – in fact, 16–24 year olds are the loneliest age group in the UK. And while loneliness is not a mental health issue, research indicates a link between loneliness intensifying problems like anxiety and depression (and vice versa). Although we can all experience loneliness, we each experience it differently, and this can be impacted by factors like our age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, environment, health, employment status, and class.

2

How should we talk about loneliness?

People often say that someone is 'suffering' from loneliness, or that loneliness is something we 'admit' to having. The truth is that there's nothing wrong or shameful about feeling lonely, and we should try to use neutral or positive language to talk about it.

Swap

Suffering
Admitting to feeling lonely
Curing someone of loneliness

For

Experiencing
Telling someone
How can we build up your connections?

3

What action can I take as part of the Great Winter Get Together?

There are ways anyone can take part, and sometimes the 'smallest' actions have the biggest impact. Talking with someone about loneliness can have just as big an impact as running a larger event.

Think to yourself, 'how do I currently feel talking about loneliness?' and use the scale below to find out what action you can take. Then read on for our practical advice on how to get started.



I feel embarrassed to talk about my experiences of loneliness

Share your own experience with someone you trust.



I can share when I feel lonely, but I feel awkward reaching out to others.

Reach out to someone in your life who you think might be lonely – whether that's a friend, family member, or neighbour.



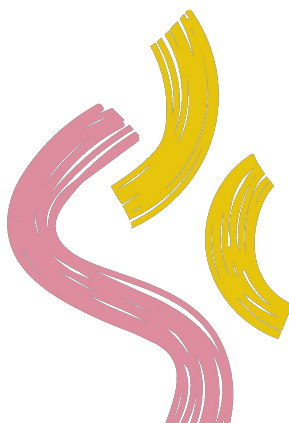
I feel comfortable both sharing how I feel and reaching out to others.

Bring people together to talk about loneliness. Your Great Winter Get Together can be an organised community event, or just a casual discussion – perhaps with those in a club you're a part of, or your colleagues at work.



I feel lonely – how do I share my experience with someone I trust?

Sharing this feeling with someone else can make you feel more empowered and in control of the situation. You don't need to feel nervous about starting the conversation, remember that you're speaking to someone you trust. Rather than saying 'I am lonely', try saying 'I feel lonely' – this acknowledges that it's something you're experiencing at the moment, but it's not permanent. **If you don't feel comfortable saying you are feeling lonely, try something like:**



'I feel like I'm not connecting enough with other people, even though I'd like to'.



I wonder if someone I know is feeling lonely – how do I reach out and ask?

Sometimes people don't want to say they're lonely or they don't want it pointed out to them. **Try saying:**

"Do you think you'd benefit from seeing more people?" to open up the conversation

You could also think about some suggestions of events or activities they could take part in – whether that's community gardening, going to a Parkrun or joining an online forum about a subject they're interested in.



I want to bring people together to talk about loneliness – where do I start?

If you're looking for a planning checklist or promotional materials to use, take a look through our [organiser resources \[link\]](#). If you're wondering how you can encourage people to connect at your event, check out these practical tips from Talking Taboos:

Before the event

- When you publicise your event, consider stating that people are more than welcome to come along by themselves and providing the contact details of a lead organiser for those who might be nervous about attending.
- Let people know that the event is about getting to know each other as much as it is about going for a walk, enjoying food, or whatever activity you might have planned.
- Offer the option for people to join for a cup of tea before the event, or stay for one afterwards.

At the event

- Give people something to break the ice – this could be providing name badges and also a more personal badge like their favourite food or place.
- Have someone share their story of loneliness (with their agreement in advance) as part of the event to encourage people to feel safe to share their own experiences.
- If it's a larger event, make the social interaction more informal by breaking into smaller groups (3-4 people). This can be done in virtual settings too by using 'breakout rooms'.
- At the end, let attendees know if there are any other upcoming events they can attend.

After the event

- Consider creating a WhatsApp group for attendees to follow up with each other.
- Check in on those who said they would come along but did not attend and invite them back to future events.



Tips for encouraging young people to connect

1

Publicise your event on social media and with local colleges or universities if appropriate.

2

Encourage swapping numbers and Instagram handles at the end so young people can stay in touch.

3

If there is any embarrassment and awkwardness, sometimes the best thing to do is to acknowledge this and own it – almost taking responsibility for that embarrassment – so younger participants are freed from having to worry about it.



Looking for expert support with loneliness?

If you need to speak to someone urgently, contact Samaritans on their 24/7 helpline by calling 116 123.

Contributors



The Great Get Together is an initiative of Jo Cox Foundation which encourages people across the country to make new connections and promote Jo's message that we have #moreincommon.



Marmalade Trust is a charity that raises awareness of loneliness and helps people to make new connections.



Talking Taboos is a charity dedicated to reducing stigma around serious health and social issues.

Get in touch

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