



# Tackling Loneliness in Leicestershire



A guide to reducing  
loneliness in communities

**#withinyourgifttogive**

[www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/tackling-loneliness](http://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/tackling-loneliness)



Leicestershire County Council is committed to working together with our communities and partners to improve the lives, health and wellbeing of residents living in the county. The importance of such issues are included in many of our plans, such as the Council's Strategic Plan, Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Communities Strategy and Equalities Strategy.

Many people across all sections of society experience loneliness or isolation at various times in their lives. Loneliness can affect anyone, regardless of the area you live in, your background or your personal circumstances.

Loneliness is a challenge experienced all over the country, which is why a national Loneliness Strategy was published in 2018. We are seeing that loneliness is a real issue in our communities, affecting lots of people, in lots of different ways. It can affect elderly people who live alone; young people who are struggling with social pressures; people with disabilities and mental health issues; those who have caring responsibilities; people who are unemployed, and also people who have recently become parents. The impact of feeling lonely can have quite a significant effect on how we feel. This can have lots of different impacts on our health and wellbeing.

This guide provides a lot of useful information to help people reduce feelings of loneliness. It also has information about local sources of support, as well as how to get involved in community groups, projects and activities, which can help people to feel active and included.

We want people in Leicestershire to be happy, healthy and safe. We also want people to feel included, so that we can value the contributions all people can bring to society. It is therefore important that we do all we can to tackle the issue of loneliness together, to help people in our communities to lead as fulfilling lives as possible.

We are all able to help each other – this is something that is **within your gift to give**. Let's do all we can to help each other.



Mrs Louise Richardson CC,  
Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities,  
Community Engagement & Rural  
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Cabinet Lead Member for Health  
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# What do we mean by loneliness?

Loneliness means different things to different people. It can also affect lots of people, in many different ways, at different times of their lives. Nationally, 5.5% of adults say that they often or always feel lonely.

The **Campaign to End Loneliness** says that feeling lonely is a normal human emotion and is simply a sign of wanting contact with people.

The **Jo Cox Loneliness Commission** describes loneliness as “a subjective, unwelcome feeling of a lack or loss of companionship, which happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships and interactions that we have, and those that we want”.

The **Government Strategy for Tackling Loneliness** explains that we feel lonely when we deem our relationships and social networks to be lacking in some way. The strategy also states that when people feel lonely most or all of the time, it can cause serious harm. More seriously, feeling lonely is frequently linked to early deaths and its health impact is thought to be on a par with smoking.

This is why here in Leicestershire, we are committed to tackling loneliness, to ensure people are able to improve their wellbeing and quality of life, so our residents and communities feel happier, healthier and safer.

## We asked older people and young people in Leicestershire what loneliness means to them. Here are some of the things that you shared:

- You can be lonely due to your life circumstances, e.g. being elderly, in poor health, not mobile, in economic difficulty and not having any family nearby
- Loneliness can be caused by not having access to transport or not being close to a bus route
- Loneliness can affect young mums too, not just the elderly or those who are housebound
- Poor physical and mental health can contribute to loneliness
- Loneliness can happen following close bereavement. After losing my husband after 58 years, the loss was dreadful
- Having no-one to discuss things with
- Sadness, depression, a dark hole
- You might have lots of friends on social media, but still feel lonely
- Talking or messaging people online doesn't really satisfy. Sometimes you just need to be around people
- Mental health and bullying is a really big problem for young people
- There is a lot of pressure associated with being on social media
- There should be more activities for young people to get involved in
- I volunteer at the hospital which I really enjoy as it helps me give back to the NHS who have helped me a lot in the past



# Ten top tips for if you're feeling lonely\*

What is an interesting fact about you?



What do you like for breakfast?



How about the weather?!

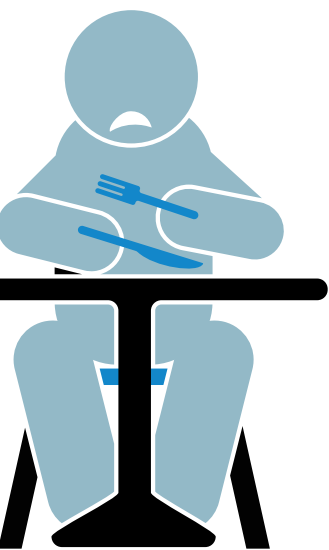


1. **Remember you are not alone.** Lots of people of all ages and backgrounds feel lonely. Millions of people in the UK say they are often or always lonely.
2. **Think about what is making you feel lonely.** Anyone can experience loneliness at some point in their life, but the reasons will vary from person to person. Taking time to think about what's causing you to feel lonely may help with finding out what could help you feel differently.
3. **Be proactive.** Look at what resources are out there. If you're going to the doctors or your local library, have a look for leaflets about any local events, exercise classes, book clubs, coffee mornings, playgroups etc. that may help you connect with your community. Alternatively you can also refer yourself to Lets Talk Loneliness (<https://letstalkloneliness.co.uk/>).
4. **Take up a new hobby that can be done in pairs or groups.** This could be something like learning a language. If you don't like it, you can always change your mind and do something else.
5. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** Try opening up to someone who you feel comfortable talking to, whether that's a member of your family, a friend, your carer or your GP.
6. **Accept help when it's presented to you.** It might be a friend or a neighbour just asking you to pop round for a brew. Don't think you're a nuisance, because in all likelihood they will want to see you and spend time with you. Try not to worry about how you're being perceived.
7. **Access free services.** There is a lot of support out there which could help you address some of the causes of your loneliness.
8. **Volunteer.** Volunteering can be a great way to meet new people and make new connections. You could help out at a local charity shop, or use your skills to support others.
9. **Surround yourself with activity.** If you're feeling alone, why not pop out to a coffee shop or somewhere where there's some activity going on? You might meet someone else in a similar situation which could spark a conversation. Try to smile at people; having someone smile back could change your day.
10. **Join groups online.** If you can't leave the house, try joining an online community who share similar interests to you.

\*Courtesy of the British Red Cross

**We asked people in Leicestershire what would help them to feel less lonely. Here are some of your suggestions:**

- It's important to stay busy and get involved in as many local activities as possible, for example coffee mornings, lunch clubs, games afternoons
- Find hobbies and interests with like-minded people
- Volunteer at the library and with local charities, as it helps you feel you are doing something worthwhile
- Get involved in church activities
- Look out for neighbours all year around
- Start a local group if there is not already one in your area
- Get out and about, go to see and meet people, even if it's just your next-door neighbour
- Occupy your time with reading, TV, walking (if you are able), and using your computer or tablet





## How to start a conversation

One of the things we can do to help each other to feel less lonely is to talk to each other. This sounds like a very simple and obvious thing to do. But taking the time to speak and listen to others really does help people to feel less lonely. **Here are some fun tips about the sorts of things you can think about when you start a conversation:**



## CONVERSATION MENU

### STARTERS

What do you like about where you live?  
What do you like for breakfast?  
What is an interesting fact about you?

### LOCAL SPECIALITIES

What three things do you think of when you think of the UK?  
What's your favourite season?  
What is your favourite place in the UK?

### MAINS

Given the choice of anyone in the world, who would you invite to a dinner party?  
What's your cure for hiccups?  
What couldn't you live without?  
What's your favourite family tradition?

### SWEET STUFF

What was the last thing that made you laugh?  
Who is your oldest friend? Where did you meet them?  
What's your favourite childhood memory about where you grew up?

### WHINE LIST

What's the most embarrassing story from your childhood?  
What's the worst hairstyle you've ever had?  
How about the weather?!



**If you think someone you know might be lonely, look out for signs in the person:**

- Having a significant change in their routine
- Not going out as much, or having less contact with others
- Neglecting their appearance
- Not eating or sleeping properly
- Saying they feel sad, frustrated, empty, desperate or worthless

**If you are concerned about someone's wellbeing and would like to report your concerns, telephone: 0116 305 0004 (for adults) and 0116 305 0005 (for children and young people)**





# Things we can do for ourselves and others

There are many ways in which we can help ourselves and others to feel less lonely. Here are some ideas:

- **Say hello to people in your street.** If you're stuck for something to say, have a look at the conversation starters on the previous page.
- **Find out more about the people around you.** This could include people you work with and people you are involved in hobbies and activities with, as well as your neighbours. Making connections with those around us can really make a difference to our own wellbeing, as well those around us.
- **Hold a street party or a Big Lunch.** These are great ways of getting to know people in your street and neighbourhood.
- **Start or join a social network in your area.** You can set up a Facebook group for your neighbourhood, or create groups using <https://nextdoor.co.uk> or [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com).
- **Join the Leicestershire Timebank** which allows you to swap, borrow or share skills with others, and make a difference in your local community at the same time. [www.time4leicestershire.org.uk](http://www.time4leicestershire.org.uk)
- **Volunteer with a local community group or charity.** You can find details about local community organisations through Voluntary Action Leicestershire's volunteering website: [www.volunteerleicestershire.org.uk](http://www.volunteerleicestershire.org.uk)
- **Find out what's going on in Leicestershire.** The Go Leicestershire website is a great starting point to finding out about events and activities around the County. [www.goleicestershire.com](http://www.goleicestershire.com)  
You can also find information on Leicestershire County Council's website. [www.leicestershire.gov.uk/whatson](http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/whatson)
- **Sign up to join a course to learn something new.** Leicestershire County Council's Go Learn programme has lots of opportunities for adult learners. [www.leicestershire.gov.uk/golearn](http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/golearn)

# Local Sources of Support

- **Social Prescribing Link Workers.** Many GP practices and medical centres now have a Link Worker who can help refer you to local services in the community. Ask your GP or medical practice staff for details.
- **First Contact Plus** is a website which has details of a range of health and wellbeing support services provided across Leicestershire. [www.firstcontactplus.org.uk](http://www.firstcontactplus.org.uk)
- **Local Area Coordinators** work in local communities, helping people to improve their quality of life. You can find out if there is a Local Area Coordinator near you. [www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/csi/local-area-coordination.html](http://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/csi/local-area-coordination.html)
- **Timebanking** is a way of sharing and exchanging tasks and skills with others. [www.time4leicestershire.org.uk/](http://www.time4leicestershire.org.uk/)
- The **Leicestershire Communities** website provides a range of useful information to help local people to actively participate in their communities. [www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk](http://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk)
- **Voluntary Action Leicestershire** is an organisation which gives advice and support to people involved in running community groups, or people who are thinking of setting up a local group, as well as people who are interested in volunteering. <https://valonline.org.uk/>



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# Examples of Community Projects in Leicestershire

## The Friendly Bench™

is a purposefully designed structure which gives people from all walks of life an opportunity to connect with each other, with their local community and with nature. There are currently two Friendly Benches in Leicestershire; one in Bottesford in Melton and a second in Newbold Verdon. There are plans to install more Friendly Benches around the county.

[www.thefriendlybench.co.uk/](http://www.thefriendlybench.co.uk/)



## Voluntary Action South Leicestershire Community Champions

project uses community volunteers to provide home visits, befriending, digital support and community gatherings for people over 60 who live alone in Harborough District. [www.vasl.org.uk/communitychampions](http://www.vasl.org.uk/communitychampions)

The Rural Community Council's Rural Coffee Connect project uses a vehicle with a built-in coffee machine, to go out to rural areas of the County and provide a friendly space for local people to interact whilst enjoying a coffee. [www.ruralcc.org.uk](http://www.ruralcc.org.uk)



Local History Cafes are a great way for people to meet others and learn about history and heritage, over a cup of tea and cake. There are numerous Local History Cafes running in various parts of Leicestershire, including at Charnwood Museum in Loughborough, Kirby Muxloe and Glenfield Hospital. [www.craftingrelationships.co.uk/local-history-cafe-3/](http://www.craftingrelationships.co.uk/local-history-cafe-3/)

## How to Develop a Community Idea

The Leicestershire Communities website has lots of helpful information about how you can set up a community project, including getting started; planning your project; and how to apply for funding:

[www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/sr/developing-a-community-idea.html](http://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/sr/developing-a-community-idea.html)





Taken from 'A Connected Society: a strategy for tackling isolation and loneliness' and reproduced with permission from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Artist: Zuhura Plummer.

Further information, help and support about tackling loneliness can be found at:

A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness)

Campaign to End Loneliness: [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/)

Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness: [www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/campaigning/jo-cox-commission/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/campaigning/jo-cox-commission/)

Let's Talk Loneliness: <https://letstalkloneliness.co.uk/>

British Red Cross: [www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-with-loneliness##](http://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-with-loneliness##)

RVS – Feeling well and overcoming loneliness: [www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services/advice-and-support/feeling-well-and-overcoming-loneliness](http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services/advice-and-support/feeling-well-and-overcoming-loneliness)

National Lottery – Bringing People Together:

[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/loneliness-and-social-isolation](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/loneliness-and-social-isolation)

Pub is the Hub: [www.pubisthehub.org.uk/news/calling-last-orders-for-loneliness/](http://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/news/calling-last-orders-for-loneliness/)

Eden Project Communities: [www.edenprojectcommunities.com/](http://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/)

Re-engage (formerly Contact The Elderly): [www.reengage.org.uk/](http://www.reengage.org.uk/)

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