

This week marks Loneliness Awareness Week. The term loneliness means different things to different people, however, those who are lonely generally feel a sense of isolation or feel that they are disconnected from others. We may feel physically lonely or isolated where there is no one in our lives on a regular basis. Alternatively, we may feel loneliness following a major life event such as if we have lost someone close to us. The feeling of loneliness may have increased over the last 14 months in light of the pandemic.

We may feel lonely even when we're not alone. Loneliness relates to the quality of our relationships and our social connections and it can make us feel like we're not being properly appreciated or understood by those around us. This can also happen when the relationships in our life are lacking in emotional depth such as if we've grown apart from someone close to us or if communication has perhaps broken down.

There is evidence to suggest that the longer we feel lonely, the more likely we are to isolate ourselves and we may begin to feel that the world is an unfriendly place when that generally isn't the case. Loneliness is very much a normal human emotion and it is important to address these feelings because if it is left unmanaged, it can have a detrimental impact on our health and wellbeing.

This week is a great time to check in with yourself and really pay attention to your feelings and emotions. It might be helpful to think about things such as if you feel you are missing social contact with others and do you have healthy and supportive relationships in your life that make you feel positive and happy.

There may be times in our lives that we may not have the right amount of social connections or the emotional depth to our relationships that we need to feel happy and fulfilled. If you feel lonely, it is important to recognise that and the effect that it is having on you. In order to address those feelings, think about what immediate steps you can take such as reaching out to friends, family or colleagues at work.

With the restrictions continuing to be gradually lifted, it may be that there are local groups or clubs that you would like to be part of and meet new people while trying out a new interest or hobby. The lifting of restrictions coupled with the brighter and warmer days make activities outside much more appealing so if you think you would enjoy taking part in a local running group for example, now is a great time to get involved. Taking small steps will help us feel more connected.

When we are feeling lonely, it is as important as ever to ensure that we practice self care and look after ourselves such as eating well, exercising regularly or treating ourselves to a long bath. Healthy distractions such as reading, listening to music or watching a favourite movie can all help deal with the negative emotions attached to feelings of loneliness. You may even consider getting stuck into a project such as decorating your home!

Please remember that our Employee Assistance Programme which is provided by Health Assured remains available to all our employees. Health Assured can provide support on the full range of wellbeing issues which may include feelings of loneliness. They can be contacted 24/7 on 0800 028 0199 where professionally trained counsellors are available to take your call and provide confidential advice and support on any issue that may be concerning you. There is no cost to you for accessing the service.

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