



Employee
Assistance
Programme



EAP Newsletter

The loneliness awareness edition

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Making People Better

The loneliness awareness edition

In this month's newsletter we talk about loneliness, breaking the stigma of PTSD, celebrating Pride, and men's mental health.

This newsletter includes information about sensitive and potentially triggering topics.

A quick guide to loneliness

This year, **Loneliness Awareness Week** - hosted by the Marmalade Trust - takes place between **10th-16th June**.

In a bid to help us all understand loneliness a little better, our mental health experts here at Vita Health Group have shared a quick guide, including the most important points to know about loneliness and advice on how to support someone who you think might be lonely.



Five important points to know about loneliness



Most people will experience a form of loneliness in life

Loneliness is a universal human experience. We are inherently social beings wired for connection - loneliness serves as a signal that we need more meaningful interactions.

Regardless of age, circumstance, or background, most of us will encounter loneliness at some point in our lives. However, loneliness does manifest differently for each individual.



Loneliness is not just something older people feel

When we imagine a lonely person, the stereotype often features an older individual living alone and rarely interacting with others. While it's true that loneliness affects older adults, recent studies reveal surprising differences across age groups.

According to the BBC Loneliness Experiment, 27% of individuals over 75 reported feeling lonely often or very often. However, the highest levels of loneliness were observed among 16-24 year-olds, with a staggering 40% experiencing frequent loneliness.



Loneliness is not a mental health condition, but it can have a tangible impact on mental health

Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of depression. Individuals who feel consistently isolated are more vulnerable to developing depressive symptoms.

Research studies have provided evidence for associations between loneliness, and anxiety and depression in young people. Addressing loneliness early can help prevent these mental health challenges.



Meaningful relationships are essential for our wellbeing

Regular social interactions provide emotional support, reduce stress, and enhance our overall quality of life.



Loneliness is highly stigmatised, but we can work together to change that

By openly discussing loneliness, we can break down the stigma associated with it. Recognising and acknowledging loneliness allows us to seek the support we might need and build meaningful connections.



How to support someone who you think might be lonely

Remember, loneliness affects us all, and it's important we support one another. Let's foster connections, break down barriers, and work towards a world where no one feels truly alone.

If you suspect someone is lonely, there are a number of ways you can support them. Consider taking these steps:



Reach out

Initiate conversations and check in regularly. A simple message or phone call can make a significant difference.



Be present

Spend time with them. Whether in person or virtually, your presence matters. Engage in activities together or simply listen to what they have to say.



Encourage social activities

Suggest you take part in a group activity together, such as a craft club or an exercise class. Connecting with others who share similar interests can help to alleviate loneliness.



Help to build connections

Introduce them to new people or invite them to social gatherings. Sometimes a gentle nudge in the right direction can result in them developing meaningful friendships.



Empathise

Understand that loneliness is a valid emotion. Show empathy and validate their feelings without judgement from your side.

Breaking the stigma of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) awareness month takes place in June - a time dedicated to coming together as a collective force to raise awareness of PTSD and complex PTSD.

By promoting awareness and starting conversations, we can create a world where the effects of trauma are met with empathy, understanding and healing.



Top three questions on PTSD answered

PTSD is a commonly misunderstood disorder, so our mental health experts here at Vita Health Group have provided answers to some of the most frequently asked questions on the topic.

Q1: What is PTSD exactly?

When someone experiences a traumatic event, it is understandable to have symptoms of PTSD afterwards. It can be described as an acute stress reaction - a normal reaction to an abnormal event. Symptoms might develop within the first month, or they might develop over a longer period of time.

A lot of people find these symptoms disappear within a few weeks, but if the symptoms last longer than a month, then you may need to seek the support of a professional to discuss a PTSD diagnosis.

Q2: How do I know if I have PTSD?

It's important to know that everyone experiences PTSD differently - you might experience a similar trauma to someone else, but be affected in very different ways.

You may recognise some, none or even all of these common symptoms of PTSD...

Reliving aspects of what happened

- Vivid flashbacks (feeling like the trauma is happening right now)
- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Nightmares
- Intense distress at real or symbolic reminders of the trauma
- Physical sensations such as pain, sweating, nausea or trembling.

Alertness or feeling on edge

- Feeling panicked when reminded of the trauma
- Becoming easily upset or angry
- Hypervigilance
- Disturbed sleep
- Higher levels of irritability or aggressive behaviour
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Being easily startled
- Other anxiety symptoms.

Avoiding feelings and changing behaviours

- Feeling that you have to keep busy - using distraction to avoid the memories
- Avoiding things that remind you of the trauma
- Unable to remember details of the event
- Feeling "emotionally numb"
- Feeling "physically numb"
- Unable to express affection
- Completing self-destructive or reckless behaviours
- Using substances such as alcohol or drugs to avoid memories
- Becoming more isolated and withdrawn in the process of avoiding people or places.

Difficult beliefs or feelings

- Feeling that you can't trust people
- Feeling that nowhere is safe
- Feeling that no-one understands
- Constant negative thoughts - repeatedly asking questions that prevent you coming to terms with the event, such as over-analysing what you could have done to stop the incident leading to further negative feelings about yourself
- Blaming yourself for what happened
- Overwhelming feelings of anger, sadness, guilt or shame.

What's a flashback?

A flashback is a vivid experience where you relive aspects of the traumatic event, or feel as if it is happening to you in that moment. It could be as if you're watching a video of what happened, but equally it might be about noticing sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations or emotions that you experienced during the trauma.

You might notice that particular things trigger a flashback for you - people, places or situations - or you might notice they are random. Flashbacks can last for a few seconds, several hours or even days.

Q3: How might PTSD impact my life?

It is common to experience other mental health problems - such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or dissociative disorders - alongside PTSD.

If you are experiencing symptoms of PTSD, you might also notice difficulties in everyday aspect of life, such as:

- Looking after yourself
- Holding a job down
- Maintaining friendships or relationships
- Remembering things or making decisions
- Sex drive
- Coping with change
- Enjoying leisure time.



Six simple techniques to cope with flashbacks



1/ Focus on breathing

Count slowly to five while breathing in, and again while breathing out.



2/ Carry an object that reminds you of the present

This will help to focus your mind on the here and now.



3/ Tell yourself that you are safe

Remind yourself that the trauma is over and you are safe. You could write down some useful phrases to read through to remind yourself of this.



4/ Use items of comfort to support yourself

Listen to music that you enjoy, watch a favourite film, cuddle a pet or curl up under a blanket.



5/ Keep a diary of flashbacks

Looking for patterns in flashbacks can help you to predict when they might happen. Some people find that keeping a diary of flashbacks helps them to better manage them overall.



6/ Use grounding techniques

For example counting objects around you or describing your surroundings in detail.

It's Pride month: Why we celebrate, key facts and how to support the LGBTQIA+ community





What is Pride month?

Pride month is all about acceptance, equality, celebrating the work of LGBTQIA+ people, education in LGBTQIA+ history and raising awareness of issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community. Pride stands for being proud of who you are, no matter who you love.



Why does Pride take place in June?

On June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn - a gay bar in New York - sparking an uprising that changed gay rights for people in America and around the world. The first 'Pride', in June 1970, marked the first anniversary since the uprising at the Stonewall Inn.



Why is the movement called Pride?

The suggestion to call the movement 'Pride' came from L. Craig Schoonmaker who, in 2015 said...

"A lot of people were very repressed, they were conflicted internally, and didn't know how to come out and be proud. That's how the movement was most useful, because they thought, 'Maybe I should be proud.'"

Did you know...

More than a third of LGBT staff (35%) have hidden that they are LGBT at work for fear of discrimination.

Two-thirds (64%) of LGBTQ+ people have experienced anti-LGBT+ violence or abuse.

One in eight LGBT people (13%) have experienced some form of unequal treatment from healthcare staff because they're LGBT.

*Stonewall

How to be an ally to the LGBTQIA+ community



1/ Stay informed

Get yourself familiar with LGBTQIA+ terminology, watch movies, documentaries, and read articles and coming-out stories of individuals to gain a greater understanding of their experiences. This will help you to better support the LGBTQIA+ community.



2/ Be accepting

Acceptance is the foundation to good allyship. As an ally, your behaviours need to demonstrate that you accept and validate the gender of LGBTQIA+ individuals and/or sexual identities.



3/ Be a safe person

If someone has come out to you or confided in you, it is important you do not share this information. Not everyone can be out everywhere, which may be for a variety of different reasons. Outing them to other people could put them at risk. It is for them to share this information with others when they are ready. Respond with empathy and positive regard, and help them to access support and resources where appropriate.



4/ Take action

Good allies take action to improve the world around them. Educate yourself about the issues impacting LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals, whether in your workplace or in the broader community. If you witness discrimination or bullying, call it in - this is an important process for self-improvement.



5/ Check your language

Making gender assumptions based on someone's external appearance, and using incorrect pronouns, could remind someone of their past struggles. It's important to clarify a person's pronouns and to use the ones they are comfortable with. Avoid using gendered language and asking gendered questions as this is assumptive and can create anxiety. Instead of asking "do you have a girlfriend?" ask "do you have a partner?".



6/ Adopt a growth mindset

Genuine mistakes can happen; we are all human and no one is perfect. If you make a mistake, apologise, and correct yourself. Be self-reflective and put in place measures to prevent re-occurrence. Most people will appreciate this.

How to support the men around you with their mental health



Societal expectations and traditional gender norms often discourage men from openly discussing their health, particularly their mental health concerns.

In fact, despite **77% of men** suffering from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or stress*, **only 36%** of referrals to NHS Talking Therapies are for men**.

By fostering awareness and understanding we can empower men to **recognise, address, and seek help** for their mental health concerns, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more supportive society.

*Priory Group **NHS Digital



Here are five simple steps to help you navigate a conversation with a friend, family member or colleague who you think might be struggling with their mental health.



1/ Ask how they are doing

When we're struggling with mental health, it can be really hard to be honest about how we're feeling. In fact, more than a third of men who want to talk about their mental health say that they would ask how their friend is doing, in the hope that friend reciprocates the question. So if in doubt, always ask a person how they are and be prepared to read between the lines.



2/ Don't take 'fine' as the final answer

There are times we've all said we're 'fine', when we're really not. It's important to trust your instinct and don't hold back on asking twice. Instead of asking "how are you?" which invites 'fine' as an answer, you could mention something you've picked up on. For example: "I notice you've not responded in the group chat for a while - are you feeling OK?".



3/ Actively listen

Ensure you give the other person your full attention - put your phone out of sight, ensure it's on silent and prepare yourself to listen. Repeat back what they've said to you so they know you've heard them - for example: "I hear you're feeling really stressed at the moment and that can't be easy". You could also ask questions to encourage further discussion for example: "how long have you been feeling this way?"



4/ Signpost them towards professional support

It's not your role to find a solution - more often than not, your friend, family member or colleague simply wants to know that you're there for them. Ensure they know they are not alone and professional support is out there for them. If they've been feeling low for more than two weeks, suggest they speak to their GP, self refer to a NHS Talking Therapies service, or - if available - seek help via their employer's employee assistance programme (EAP).



5/ Check in

Put a date in the diary for a phone call or a meet-up. Not only will this help to show that you really care about how they are doing, but you'll also be able to gauge whether they've made any progress and how they are feeling in time. At minimum, send them a follow-up text.

Support services

NHS - 999 or A&E

If you're concerned that someone's life is in danger and think they need immediate support, call 999 or take them to A&E.

Call: 999

NHS - 111

For when you need help but are not in immediate danger.

Call: 111

Shout Crisis text line

24/7 free text service for anyone in crisis, struggling to cope and needing immediate help.

Text: 85258

The Samaritans

Confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair and suicidal thoughts.

Call: 116 123 available 24/7

Calm

Confidential helpline and live chat. Open from 5pm to midnight every day, 365 days a year.

Call: 0800 585 858



Our tip of the month

The one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

Equip yourself with coping strategies for when times get tough.

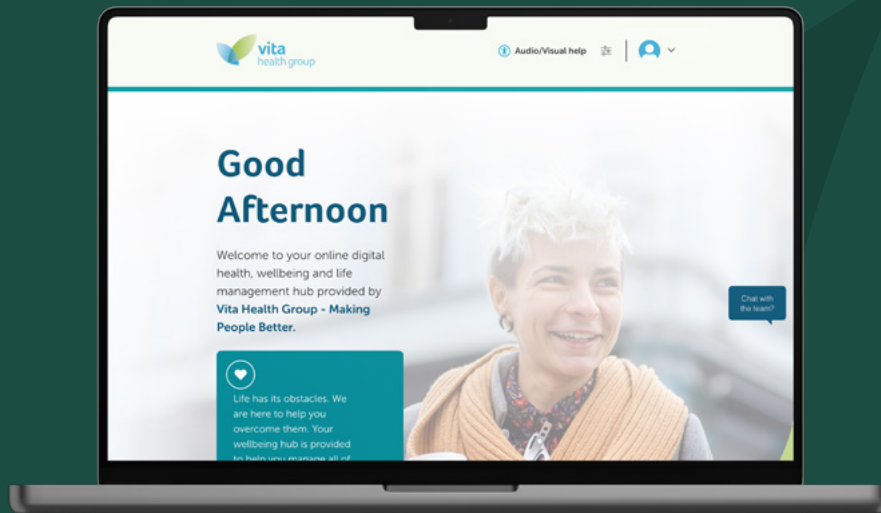
It's easy to get caught in a spiral of negative thinking about the future, particularly if you're experiencing a tough time. Remember, it's completely normal to have worries and concerns - more often than not, you'll move past these thoughts quite quickly.

But if you find yourself going down a rabbit hole of uncertainty and pessimism, it's helpful to have some coping strategies to hand:

1. Focus on the short term and try to steer clear of long-term thinking, which can often feel overwhelming.
2. List out what you've achieved and succeeded in recently. That could be anything from cooking a meal from scratch, helping out a friend, delivering a presentation, or, if you're dealing with some serious things in life right now, getting by is an achievement in itself.
3. Try to avoid dwelling on the past and stay in the present moment. Use techniques such as breathing exercises, mindfulness or a repetitive activity like cross-stitch or crochet.

On-Demand Digital Wellbeing Programmes included in your Wellbeing Hub

Our digital wellbeing programmes provide the skills necessary to better manage everyday issues that affect your emotional and overall wellbeing.



Interactive, Practical, Wellbeing Programmes

These programmes provide participants with tools and strategies to create small behavioural changes that allow them to reduce stress and increase resilience and emotional health through various techniques.

- Stress programme
- Positive Body Image programme
- Mindfulness programme
- Resilience programme
- Sleep programme
- Money Worries programme
- Perinatal Wellbeing programme
- Alcohol programme
- Breast Cancer programme – Depression & Anxiety

Programmes are easy to use, on your computer, table or phone. Start your free programme today.

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Clinically Verified

Up to
80%
of participants show improvement in depression and anxiety symptoms.

Up to
93%
users satisfaction.

Up to
65%
of users achieve clinically significant improvement.

Helped over
1m+
users think and feel better.

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