

LONELINESS



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Everyone at some time experiences loneliness. For some it may be when there has been a big change in their life e.g. coming to university. It may be that you find making friends difficult. This feeling can come not just when you're alone but when you're in a crowd, in class, at a party, at a concert or sports event. This feeling can hit you out of the blue, when you're excluded from something or when you have a need that is not being met.

Loneliness is widespread - research (Barker M, Clarke C, Cox T) shows that loneliness is a chronic problem for 17% of students in Higher Education.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a painful awareness that you're not feeling connected to others and important needs are not being met. People need people. For some that need is greater than others. Mutual relations are essential to an individual's sense of wellbeing. If you feel lonely, you feel the need to share your thoughts and feelings with another who will listen and understand you.

You can feel lonely:

- When you're alone
- When you do not feel part of a group or event
- When there is no one with whom you can share your feelings and experiences
- When you feel disconnected and alienated from the environment and the culture around you
- When there is no one to know how miserable and isolated you feel

If loneliness sticks around for a while then other feelings can surface too. You can begin to feel angry, afraid, misunderstood, worthless and depressed. Along with these feelings can come negative self-talk. You can begin to put yourself down, think that no-one cares about you, that you're not worth getting to know, and that something is wrong with you. This has a way of diminishing any confidence you may have had and can keep you stuck. Thinking this way can only make you feel unhappy, isolated and less able to do something to help your loneliness.



COMMON FEELINGS LONELINESS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL:



- Like a outsider
- Invisible and unknown
- Disliked and unacceptable
- Self conscious and ill at ease
- Hurt, powerless and despairing

Loneliness is often seen as taboo and this creates a vicious circle:

I feel lonely . . .

I cannot tell anyone . . .

I feel more lonely . . .

ADDITIONAL COMPLICATING FACTORS

Anyone can feel lonely. Students from the following groups, however, seem more likely to experience loneliness at university and this may be true for you:

- **International Students** – you may experience culture shock and a sense of disorientation; customs, language, food, weather and environment may be unfamiliar and isolating.
- **Mature Students** – you may be living off campus, perhaps with your own family and feel cut off from other students around you by age and external commitments; also you may be finding it hard to integrate these two separate parts of your life.
- **Shy Students with Low Self-Esteem** – you may find it very difficult to initiate contact with others, even when you want to.
- **Single Male Students** – without any intimate relationships and away from home you may experience the loneliness of lacking demonstrative affection and of not being able to find it.
- **Bereaved Students** – you may find yourself isolated by grief, cut off from everyday experiences and relationships by the overwhelming sense of loss and despair.
- **Students with Separated Parents** – as you leave home for university, you may experience heightened feeling of insecurity and aloneness from the time of your parents' separation.

Loneliness can be overcome. It's a feeling like any other feeling (it's not a state of being) and it's telling you something very important. Be honest with yourself and ask yourself "what do I need?" and when you have the answer care for yourself by meeting that need. It may require you to have courage, take risks, expand your horizons a bit; you'll be glad you did.



WAYS OF COPING



- Put yourself into new situations where you can meet like-minded people e.g. if you like photography then join a photography class.
- Seek out situations where you can get involved with other students in your class.
- Learn to be assertive, start to say hi to fellow students or start a short conversation with someone you sit close to.
- Find out what is happening in the university that you might be interested in and get involved.
- Risk taking the initiative: your reticence can be misunderstood by others as aloofness or unfriendliness. If you're feeling lonely in a lecture, avoiding eye contact and pretending you're fine by absorbing yourself in a book or paper you may be putting others off from contacting you. If you stop and look around you, you may find others sitting on their own who would welcome a smile from you.
- Do some volunteer work. Helping others can really boost your self-esteem and make you feel good about yourself.
- Start believing in yourself, that you're a person worth getting to know. Turn that negative self-talk around, give yourself a chance and give those around you a chance to know you too.

It can be difficult to admit feeling lonely, because of the sense of personal failure that so often goes with it. Perhaps you have been told you're going to have the time of your life at university. And yet an acknowledgement of the problem really helps. In fact, one of the key findings of the research mentioned earlier, is that students who have been feeling lonely said that the greatest help was talking about their feelings to someone who listened, cared, understood and accepted them.

If you feel that you require an appointment as soon as possible, please email counselling@abertay.ac.uk. Appointments are based on staff availability, but we will try to see you within a few days. If it's an emergency, please refer to the resources listed below for urgent support details.



SOURCES FOR HELP

If this all sounds too difficult, ask for help, speak with one of our Counsellors or Mental Health Nurse Advisors who can support you in this.

To make an initial appointment you can come to the Student Enquiry Zone, Level 1, The Bernard King Library.

Alternatively, you can email counselling@abertay.ac.uk

The Muslim Prayer Room is maintained by the Abertay Islamic Society. There are two prayer rooms – one for brothers and one for sisters and they can be found in the Baxter Building in rooms 3057 and 3059. The Chaplaincy is located in Room 2034, Old College.

Contemplation Room

The Quiet Contemplation Room is a small, inclusive space on Level 2, of the Old College (Room 2034.1) where students or staff of any religion, or of no religion, can read, pray, meditate or engage in quiet reflection. It's open throughout the day and during the evening.

The Samaritans are available 24 hours:

Tel: 116 123

SMS: Text SHOUT to 85258

USEFUL READING

Intimacy and Solitude by Stephanie Dowrick, Womens Press.

**Loneliness, Stress and Well-Being:
A Helpers Guide** by P M Murphy & G A Kupshik

USEFUL WEBSITES

Abetay Student Association has resources, information on societies and events and offers advice and meet ups:

abertaysa.com

[mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/
student-guide-loneliness](http://mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/student-guide-loneliness)

breathingspace.scot



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ENQUIRIES:

Student Enquiry Zone (SEZ)

Level 1, The Library Building,
Abertay University,

Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1HG

T: 01382 308805/01382 308833

E: counselling@abertay.ac.uk

EQUALITY STATEMENT:

The University Equality Policy
can be found at:

abertay.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion



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