

How feelings of loneliness and isolation can make it difficult to re-interact after lockdown

People who have been shielding could become "prisoners in their own homes" due to a loss of confidence after months indoors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a real fear for many of us about reintegration into society. This for many is leading to increased bouts of anxiety and restlessness. Anxiety because they wonder "how it will be" and will they "fit in". Restlessness because of an underlying fear that they may not cope once back in the world of "bustle" and being around lots of people again. "What will I talk about? Will I be safe? How will I cope with people and noise again?" are all questions that may be running through our minds. These are all real fears and need to be acknowledged and talked about so that the stigma of difference is "open and accepted".

Amid a rise in reports of loneliness, some people fear a struggle to re-integrate as lockdown eases. People who have been affected by feelings of loneliness and isolation as a result of lockdowns could find it difficult to re-integrate as lockdown restrictions ease. Those particularly affected by a lack of social contact could find themselves "left behind" and "stuck".

The Office for National Statistics ran a survey from October 2020 to February 2021, which found the level of loneliness across the UK had increased since spring 2020. The results also showed the percentage of people who felt "often or always" lonely in parts of Northern England was double the national average. The Office for National Statistics also said places with younger populations tended to have higher levels of loneliness, which was also tied closely to unemployment during the pandemic.

Many of us have a certain anxiety about having to return to these big places and social gatherings, not necessarily because we don't want to, but because we have lived in our own "safe place" for long now and going "out there" can be quite scary.

Robin Hewings, director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, says there is concern that people may be left behind in loneliness as lockdown restrictions ease.

- The lockdowns did have a big impact on our wellbeing
- Isolation has a "large impact on self-esteem", making it harder for people to pick up the phone and reach out to others for help
- Some people, they may feel a bit left behind and stuck in that loneliness

What can I do to tackle loneliness?

- It should be "a job for all of us" to reach out to those feeling lonely "so they're not having to make the first move"
- If you can, maybe reach out to your manager and discuss your concerns
- Think is there any family member or a friend that you can speak with

For more information on loneliness please see the below link to a previous webinar that Care first have put together on "Loneliness during the COVID-19 Pandemic"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=315-3pneac4>

What support is available?

The Campaign to End Loneliness says

- Advice lines and websites are available for those whose wellbeing has been affected by lockdown isolation
- People can also approach their GP who may refer them onto a social prescribing link worker, who help support people into activities which reduce loneliness, such as social clubs, classes or sports teams

There's a great misconception that when people think of loneliness they only think of older people who are living alone. And yet, our young people have struggled as much (if not more so) in some areas of the country. The Pandemic has impacted the lives of everyone in some way. We know there has been an increase in alcohol misuse, the emergence of diagnosable Mental illness and sadly, an increase in suicide. Some of this has been as a direct cause of the lockdowns.

How can Care first help?

If you feel you may need some emotional or practical support, you can contact Care first on the Freephone number. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. Whilst our BACP accredited Counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support with emotional issues, our expertly trained Information Specialists are available 8am-8pm Monday-Friday to provide advice on any practical issues that may be causing you a stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation.

All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

If you would like to view the Webinar on '**How feelings of loneliness and isolation can make it difficult to re-interact after lockdown**' This is being delivered live on **Wednesday 26th May at 12pm**, please use the below link to register for this session –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6993314381051267853>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.