Isolation and loneliness at Christmas

Many families look forward to the Festive Season and as Christmas approaches we begin to plan, prepare, remember and perhaps even to dream. However since the COVID-19 pandemic everything has been a little different to say the least. You might be alone on Christmas for different reasons, such as the death of a loved one, living far from relatives, or because of social isolation. Loneliness at Christmas can be particularly hard.

Rachel Boyd, information manager at the mental health charity Mind, says ‘Loneliness isn’t the same as being alone. Some people choose to be alone and live happily without a lot of contact. Other people might have lots of social contact, be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely.’ Boyd adds that the ‘pressure’ to feel the absolute opposite of ‘lonely’ when it comes to Christmas can ‘make feelings of loneliness even bigger’.

Effects of loneliness on mental health

Most people have experienced loneliness at some point during their lives. However, experiencing loneliness for a prolonged period can affect our mental health by causing stress, heightened anxiety and depression.

Preventing loneliness

During unusual times we need to adapt the ways we stay in touch with one another to maintain the social networks and relationships we have.

There are various ways we can easily stay in touch using technology when meeting in person isn’t possible.

It is also important that we try to maintain routines and interactions where possible, whether that’s playing games online with friends or hosting a virtual quiz, socialising around something fun can be very beneficial.

So what can those feeling lonely and isolated do to help with these feelings at this time of year?

- **Sign up to do something festive (even if this is on line)** - It could be the chance to meet with others even if on line. It could be a carol singing event or a festive wreath or other decoration

- **Get in touch with old friends** - This could be a colleague you have worked with in the past or a neighbour you haven’t seen for a while

- **Talk with someone about how you are feeling** - Remember “it okay not to be okay” So talk with those around you or closest to you and be honest about how you really feel. Speak to us and Care first
• **Take exercise** - Don’t stay indoors and isolate yourself. Whatever the Pandemic has caused, the one clear message has been to get outdoors for regular exercise. This is so good for our overall wellbeing and mental health

• **Read/watch TV** - Get involved in a good book or catch up on films you may have not got round to watching yet

• **Try to reach out every day** - Aim to contact and speak with someone each day. Often we don’t feel we can be bothered or that people won’t want to hear from you, but why not make the effort and see?

• **Join an online social club** - There are many on line groups and clubs that have started during the Pandemic. There will be people there like you who may be going through a tough time or, you may just want to be part of an online social group

• **Volunteer** - Things such as Crisis at Christmas, delivering food boxes to people, or offering to speak on the telephone via various befriending charities are always on the lookout for volunteers so if this interests you, why not give it a try?

• **Be kind to yourself** - Be kind to yourself and do something special for yourself

**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 ‘Isolation and Loneliness at Christmas” This is being delivered live on **Tuesday 23rd November at 12pm**, please use the below link to register for this session –

[https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/6900578275833217548](https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/6900578275833217548)

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.