



## Mental Health Awareness Month – May

Leanne Takaki, HR Manager

### Mental Health awareness week

Mental Health Awareness Week is happening from 9 to 15 May 2022. The official theme is 'loneliness' and, across the week, we encourage you to build meaningful connections with your friends, family, colleagues and communities.

### What is Loneliness?

Loneliness is a normal emotion. If you're struggling with your mental wellbeing because of loneliness or isolation you can talk to someone. Loneliness is our bodies' natural response to a lack of human connection – a warning sign to let us know we need contact (CALM<sup>1</sup>). According to Mind, the mental health charity, loneliness has many different causes, which vary from person to person. We don't always understand what it is about an experience that makes us feel lonely.

For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely, such as:

- experiencing a bereavement
- going through a relationship break-up
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- starting at university
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks.

Other people find they feel lonely at certain times of the year, such as around Christmas.



### Loneliness and our mental health

Loneliness affects many of us at one time or another. We know that loneliness can be both the driver for and a product of poor mental health.

---

<sup>1</sup> Campaign Against Living Miserably



The pandemic has given rise to a sense of loneliness and isolation undermining confidence in daily routines. In recent times, many of us have had far less access to loved ones. Technology is enabling healthcare professionals to see more patients without the need to travel, with convenience and cost efficiencies driving more activities online.

Our workplaces are also changing. Many staff are adapting to cross site working, and we need to embrace this change while building and maintaining meaningful connections with our colleagues.

Some studies have suggested that loneliness can be as bad for our health as addictions to smoking, drinking or eating. But, loneliness is something you can tackle. You can build up slowly, renew an old connection, find a support group, or commit to a new social activity – there are many ways to tackle feeling lonely.

We're asking staff to consider their 'unique contribution' in tackling loneliness, isolation and the barriers to connection.

### **Try a befriender service**

There are many different types of peer support service, which provide people with a space to use their own experiences to help and support each other, including experiences of loneliness and related mental health problems.

Various charities offer telephone befriender services, which put volunteer befrienders in touch with people feeling lonely.

### **Warrington Voluntary Action** has their **Good Neighbour** initiative:

Good Neighbours support people who are feeling lonely / socially isolated; have limited or no support around them and need help with the little things. This could be anything from a friendly telephone call to help with carrying out a variety of practical tasks. Good Neighbours volunteers can:

- Make weekly phone calls for a friendly chat
- Meet for a weekly walk either one-to-one or as part of a group
- Accompany people to community groups and activities to help to build confidence
- Support with technology to help people to stay connected with friends and family

[Good Neighbour Support | Warrington Voluntary Action \(warringtonva.org.uk\)](https://warringtonva.org.uk) Tel: 01925 246880

**Community Together CIC** is a non-for-profit organisation in Staffordshire providing a holistic set of services specialising in:

- Providing a 7 day per week Telephone Support Service
- Befriending - Telephone, Face to Face and Home Visits
- Stay Well Clinics
- Delivering activities that support people's mental health and wellbeing

[Home | Community Together CIC](https://communitytogether.org.uk) Tel: 01827 59646

**Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)** provides listening services, information and support for anyone who needs to talk, including a web chat.

[Loneliness and Social Isolation - Campaign Against Living Miserably \(thecalmzone.net\)](http://thecalmzone.net) Tel: 0800 585858

**Side by Side** is a supportive online community where you can:

- feel at home
- talk about your mental health
- connect with others who understand what you are going through.

Side by Side provides a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Side by Side community is a safe place to share experiences and listen to others. The community is available to all, 24/7, and is moderated daily from 8.30am to midnight.

[Side by Side | A community platform by Mind](#)

### **Look after yourself – from Mind**

Feeling lonely can be very stressful and can have a big impact on your general wellbeing, which might make it even harder to make positive steps to feeling better.

Think about how some of the following are affecting how you feel and whether you can do anything to change them:

- Try to get enough sleep. Getting too little or too much sleep can have a big impact on how you feel.
- Think about your diet. Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can make a difference to your mood and energy levels.
- Try to do some physical activity. Exercise can be really helpful for your mental wellbeing, and some people find it helps improve their self-esteem.
- Spend time outside. Spending time in green space can help your wellbeing.
- Spend time with animals. Some people find spending time around animals can help with feelings of loneliness, whether through owning a pet or spending time around animals in their natural environment
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. While you might want to use drugs and alcohol to cope with difficult feelings about yourself, in the long run they can make you feel worse and can prevent you from dealing with underlying problems.

*How is your school raising awareness for Mental Health week? What is your school's 'unique contribution' to tackling loneliness, isolation and the barriers to connection?*

*I would love to hear from you: [ltakaki@thelearningalliance.co.uk](mailto:ltakaki@thelearningalliance.co.uk)*