

Loneliness Help sheet

Feelings of loneliness are not unusual; we all experience these feelings at particular times in our life and modern living can make us more vulnerable. Feelings of loneliness can be deeply uncomfortable and distressing but can be overcome by a combination of challenging the way we think about our feelings of loneliness, learning how to be alone and learning to be with others. The mental health charity Mind provide an excellent booklet about how to cope with loneliness that details exactly what it is, why it happens, and how to overcome it which is available to purchase from their website for £1 at the following link

http://www.mind.org.uk/shop/booklets/mental_health_awareness/330_how_to_cope_with_loneliness

The following are some ways of challenging your thinking about feelings of loneliness and some practical tasks to help you cope (Adapted from. T, Powell (2009) The Mental Health Handbook. A cognitive Behavioural Approach. A Speech Mark Practical Resource. Pg 105)

1. Recognise thinking distortions. When we feel lonely or are in a depressed mood we have the tendency to think in distorted ways. For example black and white thinking, awfulising / catastrophising, taking things personally, focusing on the negative, jumping to conclusions, living by fixed rules, or being ruled by our feelings (without looking at other sources of information) Think about some common thoughts associated with feeling lonely, such as “I have no friends” or “nobody likes me” and consider how your thinking is distorted.
2. Stop comparing yourself with others. Everyone’s lives are different and it is likely that you have an idealised fantasy about other people’s lives which means that yours can never match up.
3. Recognise the link between low mood and withdrawing from people. Turn this process around and start approaching people instead of avoiding them. This may be difficult at first but gets easier with practice. Plan activities that increase your social contacts, contact people you know and like. Talk to neighbours or develop a hobby.
4. Recognise the difference between being alone and loneliness. You do not have to be alone to feel loneliness, likewise you do not have to feel loneliness when you are alone. Learn to enjoy doing things for yourself and caring for yourself e.g. cooking your favourite meal. Quite often feeling comfortable with ourselves makes us more attractive to others.
5. Plan a list of activities to do on your own. Before you do them rate how satisfying you think they will be on a scale of 1 – 100, do the activity and then rate them again to see how satisfying they really were. Some example activities could be swimming, going to the cinema, or visiting a local attraction.
6. Get a pen and paper and write down a list of advantages to being alone e.g. allows me to develop resilience, it gives me time to relax, I can please myself without worrying about others etc etc.

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