

Feeling Lonely?

Supporting you to feel
more socially connected



Who we are

Age Scotland is the Scottish charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 and promote their rights and interests.

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people enjoy better later lives.

We have three strategic aims:



We help older people to be as well as they can be



We promote a positive view of ageing and later life



We tackle loneliness and isolation

How we can help

We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

Our **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.



Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222
(Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm)



Visit agescotland.org.uk
to find out more.

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Introduction

Loneliness can impact anyone, at any age, but older people can be particularly at risk. Later life can bring changes that make it more challenging to stay socially connected. We are more likely to experience loss in later life, and to have disabilities, health issues or changes in income that can make getting out and about more difficult. It can also be difficult to tell others that we are feeling lonely, because we fear stigma, rejection or pity.

It is normal to feel lonely occasionally. Most people have felt lonely at some point in their lives, and there are many different reasons it can happen. But if you are feeling lonely most or all of the time, it can start to affect both your mental and physical wellbeing. It is thought that long-term loneliness can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and can increase the risk of developing a variety of health conditions including depression and anxiety, high blood pressure, heart disease and dementia. Worryingly, our latest research found that 1 in 10 people over 50 in Scotland feel lonely most or all of the time.

This guide is for you if you are feeling lonely and would like to be more connected to the people and communities around you. It may also be useful if you are concerned about an older person being lonely, and want to offer help but are unsure how to begin. It explains some of the common causes of loneliness, and provides practical advice about building more, and more fulfilling, social connection.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness can be described as the feelings you experience when you don't have the kind of social contact that feels meaningful to you. But it's not always straightforward.

Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Many people prefer some, or even a lot of, time to themselves. Others like to be surrounded by people as often as possible. The amount and type of social connection people need and want can vary greatly, both from person to person, and also over time.

Even if you socialise regularly, and have lots of people in your life, you can still experience loneliness. You have likely heard the phrase 'feeling alone in a crowded room'.

What matters is not the amount of social connection that you have; it is whether you have the amount and type of social contact that feels right for you.





What causes loneliness?

What causes us to feel lonely is a very individual thing, but older people tell us that changes in their lives are often a major factor, for example:

Retiring from work - this can be challenging as you adjust to seeing colleagues less and having less structure to your week.

Changes in relationships - this may be through bereavement, moving to a new home, family or friends moving away, a relationship with a partner ending or anything that leads to people you are close to being less present in your life.

Health changes - the older we get, the more likely it is that health changes play a part in our lives. This could include mental, physical, mobility or cognitive issues that prevent you from getting out and about as much as you used to, or that make you feel more worried about going out.

Changes in confidence - life changes may have made you feel less confident than you used to, which can make it more difficult to keep doing things you enjoy.

i It is normal to have times when your mood is low. However, if you feel down for a long time, or it is affecting your daily life, you may be having difficulties with your mental health.

Don't feel embarrassed about asking for help; one in four people experience mental health issues at some point during their life, so you are not alone. Speak to your GP to talk about options for support and treatment.

What prevents us from being more social?

There are many reasons that some people find it more challenging to socialise. Whatever the reason, Age Scotland's **Friendship Service** will do its best to help.

Stigma

Although loneliness affects more than one in two of us, we often feel awkward or embarrassed about admitting it, or asking for help. However, just taking the first step can help you to feel more positive.

Whether you want a quick chat to brighten your day, or something longer term, call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** to speak to our friendly team.

Financial issues

The cost-of-living crisis has made life harder for many people, and you may have less money available for social activities. Check that you are receiving all the financial support that you are entitled to, and consider free or low-cost options for meeting with others, such as organised walks or local coffee mornings.

i A benefit check from one of Age Scotland's friendly and expert helpline advisers can help you to make sure you are not missing out on money that you are entitled to.

To request your free, confidential check, call the helpline on **0800 12 44 222**. If you'd like to know more about benefit checks before going ahead, you can also request a copy of our **What is a benefit check?** guide.





Living rurally

If you live in a rural area, you may have fewer options for social interaction nearby, or difficulties finding suitable transport.

Disability Equality Scotland's **Accessible Travel Hub** has information about travel options in Scotland. Visit **accessibletravel.scot** or call them on **0141 370 0968**. The Scottish Government website also has travel information for older or disabled people, at **www.mygov.scot/transport-help**.



Cultural differences

Older people tell us that cultural differences can make them feel lonelier at times. It can be more daunting to socialise if you have experienced stigma or discrimination. You may feel worried that you won't fit in or be accepted, particularly in groups that are not very diverse.

Age Scotland's **Community Connecting** team understands that everyone is an individual. They can help to find groups or activities in your area to suit your needs and interests, and will keep in touch to support you to settle in. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** for more information.

Digital exclusion

In recent years, particularly since the coronavirus pandemic, a lot of socialising, and organising of social activities, takes place online. Some people don't have access to the internet, or don't feel comfortable using it. Others just don't enjoy this kind of interaction, and prefer to socialise in person.

If you have internet access, and would like to feel more confident using a computer, tablet or smartphone, the **Learn My Way** website has simple tutorials aimed at helping you gain the digital skills to stay safe and connected. Visit **www.learnmyway.com** for more information and to get started.





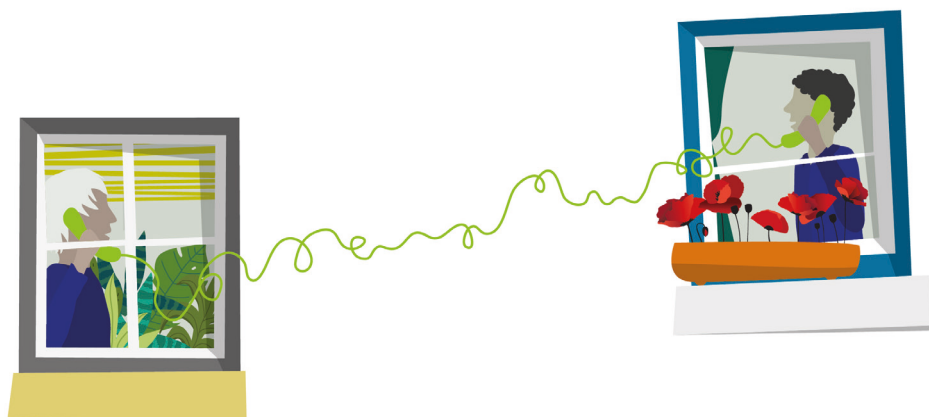
How can Age Scotland help?

Our **Community Connecting** service can help you find social groups and activities in your area. A volunteer will call to get to know you and find out what you may enjoy. They will get back to you with options local to you and check in with you as you try them out.

Our **Friendship Calls** are weekly telephone calls of friendship, support and companionship to older people in Scotland. One of our team of volunteers will call you at a weekly time slot convenient to you, ready with a listening ear for a friendly and informal chat.

Our **Friendship Circles** invite older people to join regularly scheduled group telephone calls based around a shared background, interest or language. Conversations on each agreed topic will be hosted by a volunteer at the same time each fortnight, with up to 8 older people taking part.

As well as calling the **Age Scotland helpline** for advice or to access our Friendship Services, you can also call for a friendly chat. The helpline is open weekdays from 9am-5pm on **0800 12 44 222**. Our advisers will be happy to speak to you.



What else may help us to feel less lonely?

Reconnecting with family or friends

If there is someone you haven't spoken to for a while, why not give them a call? Relationships ebb and flow over time, and you might worry about it being awkward. But getting back in touch with someone you've known for a long time can lead to fantastic conversations about shared memories, and the awkwardness will quickly pass. They might even have been feeling the same way, and be grateful you made the first move!

Sport and exercise

There are many advantages to staying active – it can help you to be as well as you can be, physically and mentally, and can be a good way to meet other people in your local community.

Visit your nearest sports centre or community centre to find out about exercise classes and clubs. You could also ask your GP practice if they have a Community Link Worker who can provide advice and support on a wide range of issues, and connect you with local services and community groups.





Checking out your local area

If you have a library, community centre or other community building nearby, and you are able to pop in, they may have posters or leaflets about clubs and groups that use the space, and you might spot something that captures your interest.

Lifelong learning

Learning a new skill, or brushing up on an old one, can be a great way to meet like-minded people. You could try learning a language, taking up a musical instrument or joining a history, science or photography group - the options are endless.

The **University of the Third Age (u3a)** has learning and interest groups in many areas across Scotland and online. Call them on **0208 466 6139** to find your nearest u3a group, or visit **www.u3a.org.uk**.

Volunteering

Whether it's spending a few hours a week helping out in a charity shop, getting crafty by knitting blankets for premature babies or putting your green fingers to good use at a community garden, volunteering can be a wonderful way to meet new people, try out a new activity and support your local community.

You could even volunteer by making **Friendship Calls** with Age Scotland, and support other older people who are feeling alone. It's easy to sign up, you'll receive all the training you need, and you'll be supported every step of the way. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** to find out more.

Worried about someone?

If you are worried that an older person you know is feeling lonely or isolated, it can be difficult to know what to do. You may want to help them to have more social connection, but be concerned about upsetting or embarrassing them. Here are some suggestions for ways you could support or encourage them to open up and take the first step.

Talk about it

The more we talk about a topic, the less stigma and awkwardness there is around it. You could use this guide as a way to start a conversation or, if you are willing, tell them about a time you have felt isolated, to encourage them to do the same.

If they haven't seemed their usual self lately, you could talk about how life can be stressful sometimes, and ask how they are doing. If they have experienced a big change in their life such as a bereavement, acknowledge how painful that can be, and share a happy memory of the person if it is comfortable to do so.

Don't worry if they don't want to join in the conversation, or talk about themselves and their feelings. It might be uncomfortable for them, or they may not be ready. It is often enough just to let someone know that you care, and are there to provide a listening ear if and when they do want to talk.



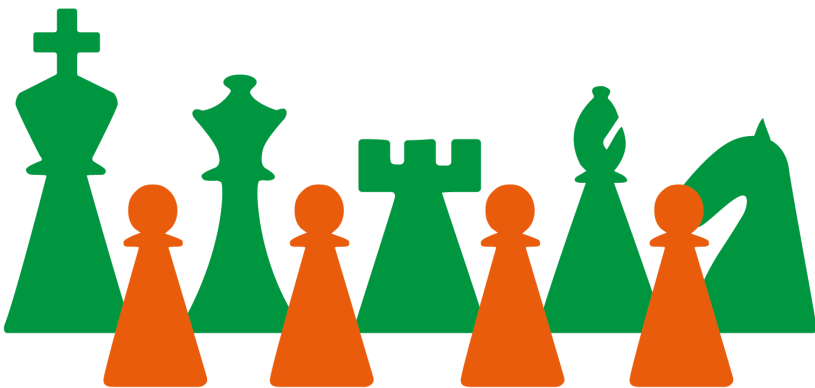
Make social visits and calls

Life can be busy, and we often only see or talk to people when there is a specific reason, for example to wish them a happy birthday, to see if they need any shopping or take them to a medical appointment.

While those things are all fantastic, try calling or dropping in on them purely to socialise, or inviting them to go for a walk or to a cafe. This is a really great way of showing someone you enjoy their company and want to spend more time with them.

Share an activity

It can be daunting to try out a new activity or join a new group on your own. By arranging to go together, you can make sure you both have someone to talk to and won't feel left out. If there are two of you, it can also be easier to join in with conversations between other groups of friends. Hopefully you will quickly get to know the other people there, and it could be a fun new social activity for both of you.

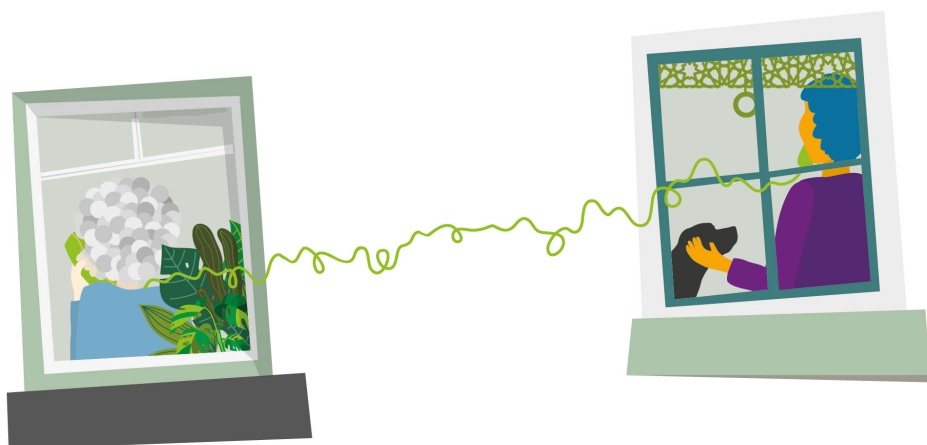


Tell them about the Age Scotland Friendship Service

Even if they don't seem immediately interested, by simply telling someone about the **Age Scotland Friendship Service** you may plant a seed that will lead to them wanting to know more.

Remember that you are not responsible for 'fixing' another person's loneliness - even if you feel they spend too much time alone, they may actually be perfectly happy that way. The most important thing is to show that you care, and make sure they have the information they need if they do want to take the first step.

If and when they are ready to get in touch, our friendly team will be ready and waiting to welcome them.





Useful contacts

Age Scotland helpline **0800 12 44 222**

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter, call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us for a copy of our publications list. You can also read, download or order publications at **www.age.scot/information**.

Breathing Space

Breathing Space provides free, confidential support from specialist advisers. It is open outwith usual business hours, via phone, textphone and webchat. An interpretation service for foreign languages and BSL is available.

0800 83 85 87 / www.breathingspace.scot

Samaritans

Samaritans has a 24-hour helpline, open 365 days a year, for anyone who is feeling low and needs to talk.

116 123 / www.samaritans.org

The Silver Line

The Silver Line helpline run by Age UK is a free, confidential service for people aged 55 and over, providing telephone friendship, conversation and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

0800 4 70 80 90 / www.thesilverline.org.uk

How you can help

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information we provide is free and impartial. It helps older people access their rights and entitlements and can be life changing.

We are also a lifeline for older people who are feeling lonely and isolated. You can help us to support older people who need us most.

Together, we can make a difference.



Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- Call **03330 15 14 60**
- Visit **age.scot/donate**
- Complete the **donation form** and return by Freepost



Fundraise

Whether it's having a bake sale or running a marathon, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, your legacy will help us to continue being there for older people for generations to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

Please donate today



Complete the form and return by Freepost to RSBS-KEHC-GBBC, Age Scotland, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

Your details

Title:	Forename:	Surname:
Address:		
	City:	
Postcode:	Date of birth:	

By providing us with your telephone number and email address you are consenting to us contacting you via phone, text and email.

Email:

Home tel: Mobile tel:

I WOULD LIKE TO DONATE

£75 ☐ £50 ☐ £25 ☐ Other (£)

I wish to pay by (please tick):

MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ CAF ☐

CharityCard ☐ Cheque ☐ (payable to Age Scotland)

Signature

Name on Card

Card No.

Expiry date Security code

Date

I prefer not to receive a thank you acknowledgement for this donation ☐

I would like information about leaving a gift in my Will ☐

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE MY DONATION WORTH 25% MORE

I want Age Scotland** and its partner charities to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

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I am a UK tax payer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Yes, I want Age Scotland to claim Gift Aid on my donations** ☐

I do not wish you to claim Gift Aid on my donations ☐

Date

Keeping in touch

We will stay in contact by post unless you ask us not to. We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure. You can change your mind at any time by emailing us on contact@agescotland.org.uk or calling us on 0333 323 2400.

You can read Age Scotland's privacy policy at [age.scot/privacypolicy](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/privacy-policy).

**Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland. Registration Number: SC153343. Charity Number: SC010100. Registered Office: Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

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Let's keep in touch

Contact us:

Head office

0333 323 2400

Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

Visit our website

www.agescotland.org.uk



Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today at **age.scot/roundup**



Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



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