

Loneliness and isolation

Your University at your side

Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton:

- provide free and confidential individual counselling
- offer non-judgemental support and understanding
- are professionally trained
- are experienced in dealing with a wide range of problems

Counselling can:

- help you to develop your strengths
- offer you the chance to focus on and understand your difficulties
- enable you to make positive decisions and changes
- help you to develop the skills and resources to cope
- help prevent small problems from becoming bigger

Get in touch

You can make an appointment to see a counsellor by filling out the Contact Us form at www.wlv.ac.uk/SSW, alternatively, you can come along to one of our drop-in services. For more information go to the web address above and click on the Mental Health and Wellbeing option. From here you will find a wealth of useful information and self-help tools as well as our Drop-ins and Group activities.

Loneliness and isolation

How to tackle feeling lonely



The experience of loneliness

The experience of 'feeling lonely in a crowd' can easily happen in a university setting. Here, we are surrounded by many people, often of a similar age and supposedly with similar interests, all of whom appear to be making friends and forming groups with ease and confidence.

Despite this we can feel lonely:

- Not knowing anyone: it may be the first time in years that we have had to make new friends
- When we move from familiar surroundings to new, unknown ones, we can feel alienated from everything around us
- Trying to maintain long distance relationships with people who are important to us
- When we feel that there is no one with whom we are close enough to share these feelings
- Because we might find it easier to spend time alone, either studying or working.

You are not alone

It is far more common than people think for students to feel self-conscious, lonely or awkward around people.

A study on loneliness and isolation in universities found that 17% of students suffered serious self-doubt and isolation, significantly higher than the general population, (Woffas, 2002).

Past studies have shown that those more likely to suffer loneliness include students living off campus, or a long way from university; overseas, part-time and mature students; and those studying on joint-honours programmes, who feel they don't belong to either of their 'home' Schools or Faculties.

A person who experiences loneliness might feel:

- Socially inadequate and unconfident
- Unwanted, unloved or rejected
- That there is something wrong with them
- Resentful or angry towards others.

Coping with change

It is perhaps not surprising that loneliness and isolation are more acute in higher education, given the great changes involved in starting a new life at university. Not only might we be leaving our family and home (and perhaps pets, too) but also long-term friendships.

Adjusting to an unfamiliar lifestyle, culture, or environment, perhaps studying in different ways, and living more independently can make us feel unsure of what to do and how to be.

For some the experience may be familiar but for others it can result in feeling acutely disappointed that university is not what was expected.

Things you can do to help yourself

- Remember that loneliness is a common feeling, but it is something that can be changed.
- Getting a job or taking a voluntary role both mean you're likely to meet people quickly
- By being a good friend to others you can increase the opportunities for creating friendship.
- Join a society or club (there are over 30 in the Students' Union). By pursuing your interests you increase the chances of meeting like-minded people.
- Don't wait for others to come to you (they may be feeling the same). While it may feel safe to be on your own, taking a little risk in putting yourself out there could make a big difference to how you feel about yourself.
- On the other hand, don't deprive yourself of things you like doing simply because there is nobody to do them with.
- Courage comes after the event, not before it!

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly speak to someone about your feelings – a friend, a parent, your Personal Tutor, your doctor, or a professional counsellor

Don't underestimate the relief which you may obtain from professional help.

You might like to read:

Butler, G. (2008) *Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness: a Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive-Behavioural Techniques*. New York: Basic Books

Csoti, M. (2006) *Overcoming Loneliness and Making Friends*. London: Sheldon Press

People you might want to contact:

- Your doctor
- Samaritans (provides confidential, emotional support 24 hours a day) – tel: **01902 426 422** or tel: **08457 90 90 90** or visit: www.samaritans.org.uk
- NHS 111 – tel: **111**
- Befrienders (international support offered (international support offered by Samaritans) website – visit: www.befrienders.org

Other useful websites:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/atozindex.aspx

Advice from Mind:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/mental-health-a-z/

Useful leaflets:

www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/

Health A-Z at:

www.nhs.uk

Free meditation exercises:

<http://franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/>

