



Understanding and Responding to Loneliness in a Changing World

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Let's introduce ourselves...

Fatima
Ishaq

Michael
Priestley



Before we begin

Timings

The webinar will be approximately 60 minutes. We do not have any scheduled comfort breaks but please feel free to step away from your screen if needed.

Recording

Please note that this webinar will be recorded and published on our website for others to watch on-demand.

Sharing personal experience

Only if you're comfortable doing so, you may be asked to share your own personal experiences during the session to help with education and training.

Safety and openness

Sensitive topics may be discussed during this webinar, please feel free to step away if needed. We want to foster a sense of safety and openness during this webinar where everyone listens to one another and supports each other's perspectives. At the end of the session, we will sign post to organisations to access further support.



About us

Charlie Waller was a dynamic, funny, kind and successful young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie died by suicide. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded the Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around depression initially, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.



Supporting young people's mental health

Our vision

A world in which young people, and families, have the support, the skills and the resilience to be mentally well for life.



Evidence based training



Positive

We take a positive approach to mental health. We focus on prevention and early intervention, and recognise the importance of offering hope.



Proven

Our consultancy, training and resources are all based on sound clinical evidence.



Practical

We give people practical strategies and tools to care for their mental health, and to support others in doing so.



Objectives for the session



Define

Loneliness and
impact on mental
health



Discuss

Different causes
and experiences



Do

Positive steps to
address loneliness

Loneliness



What is it?





One definition...

“A subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship, which happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those we want”
(Perlman and Peplau, 1981)





Loneliness and young people

19% of young people report feeling lonely all or most of the time ([HBSC, 2023](#))

Higher prevalence reported among:

- LGBTQIA+ communities
- Racialised minorities
- Lower socio-economic backgrounds
- Young girls

([Qualter, 2021](#))





The evolutionary benefit of socialising

“Nothing is more important to us than our social connections because nothing was more critical for our ancestors’ survival and reproduction”

(Von Hippel, 2019)





Hormonal change and loneliness

- Testosterone
- Serotonin
- Dopamine
- Oxytocin

(Botzet et al., 2024)





Influences on loneliness

- Peer acceptance
- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Life transitions
- Geographic isolations
- Financial insecurity
- Physical illness or disability
- Grief
- Negative self-image
- Insecure family relationships



(Korzhina et al., 2024)



Loneliness and Mental Health

“Decades of research indicate that when social connectedness is threatened, mental health is at risk.”

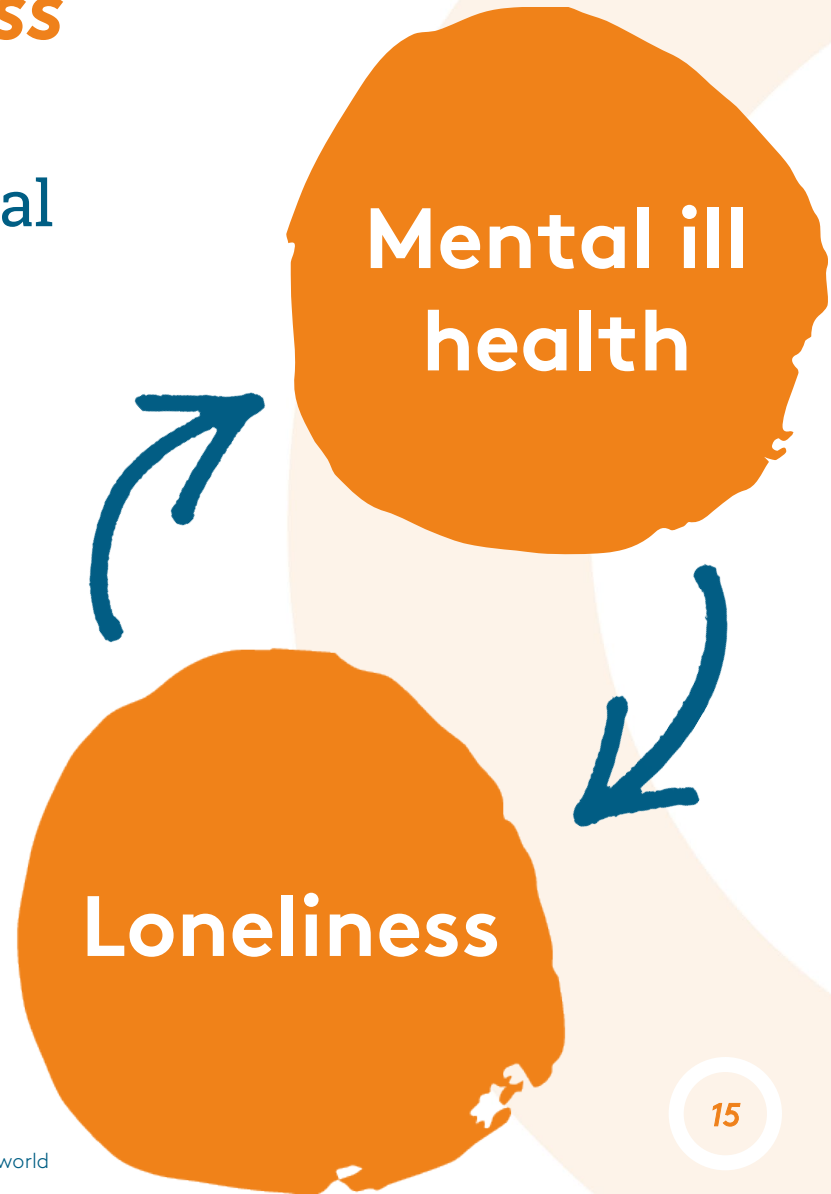
(Cruwys et al., 2021)





Research into Loneliness

While loneliness is not a mental health issue in itself, mental health problems, particularly depression and social anxiety, can cause loneliness. In the other direction, loneliness can cause mental health problems ([Verity et al., 2025](#))



Social media: Harmful or helpful?





Social Media – impact on personality development

- Comparison, and cyberbullying on social media increase risk of loneliness.
- However, social media use can also support identity development and the maintenance of existing peer relationships
(Senekal et al., 2022)





Social Media: Positives

Routine social media use is positively associated with all three health outcomes:

- Social well-being
- Positive mental health
- Self-rated health

(Bekalu, 2020)





Social Media: Negatives

However emotional connection to social media is negatively associated with all three outcomes:

- Social well-being
- Positive mental health
- Self-rated health

(Bekalu, 2020)





Social Media and young people with additional learning needs (ALN)

- Research shows that for young people with ALN, asynchronous communication can reduce anxiety by allowing time to process information and consider their responses.
- Evidence also suggests that this can reduce feelings of stigmatisation, by allowing them to draw attention to their strengths

(Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021)





Managing social media: What can help?

Actively comment and reply to others

- Passive scrolling increases negative comparison and lower self-esteem.
- Passive scrolling removes the positive mood-boosting benefits that come from person-to-person interaction.
- Active engagement can foster community ([Kaiser Permanente, 2021](#))





Managing social media: What can help?

Start using the 'unfollow' button

- Similarly to avoiding spending time with a 'toxic' friend in real life, it's suggested to stop spending time with a toxic social media friend.
- Even if they're a friend or family member in real life, using the unfollow button is recommended if following them results in negative feelings. ([Kaiser Permanente, 2021](#))





Managing social media: What can help?

Manage screen time

- Take control of your account and restrict access at certain times.
- Turning off notifications is recommended as a healthy boundary to set with social media use.
- Know where to report harmful content

(Kaiser Permanente, 2021)



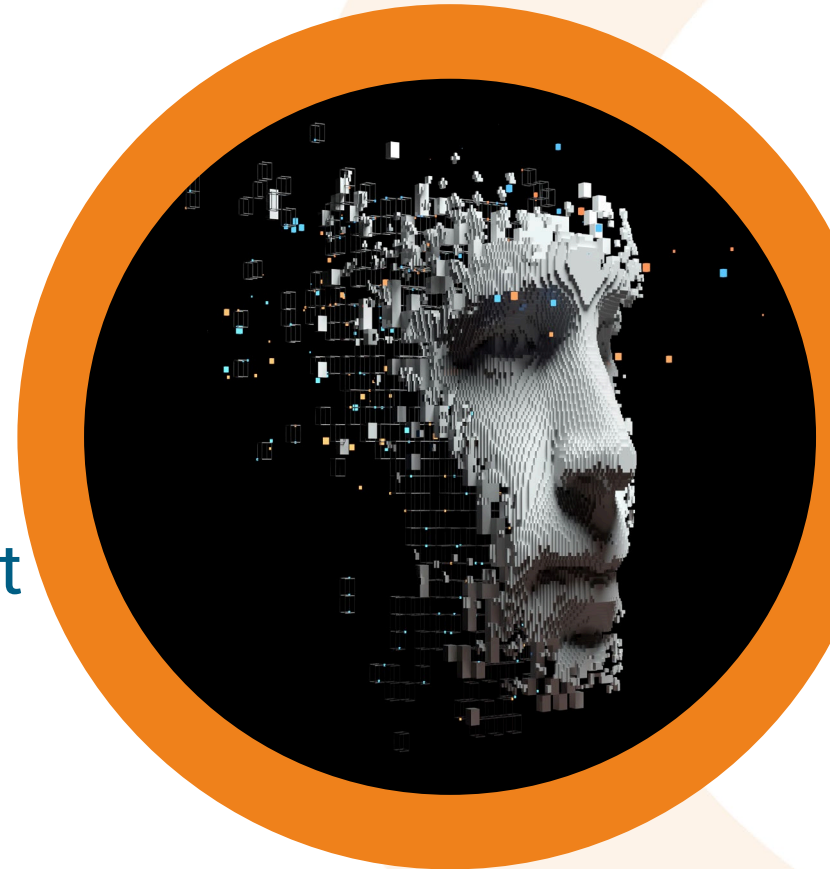


AI and Loneliness



AI and Loneliness

- In a survey of 5,035 11-to-18-year-olds in the UK, 12% reported using AI for company or someone to talk to ([Onside, 2025](#)).
- Another found 10% of 1155 18–24-year-olds in the UK use AI for friendship, whilst 9% reported having romantic or sexual exchanges with AI ([Muldoon and Mullally, 2025](#)).





AI and Loneliness

- Reasons for using AI are they are always available, non-judgemental, and positive, providing comfort to young people who might otherwise lack support.
- AI companions like Replika and Character.AI may reduce loneliness on par with human interaction, particularly where it makes users feel heard ([De Freitas et al. 2025](#)).





AI and Loneliness

- Extensive use of AI companions has been linked to increase in loneliness, depression and social withdrawal ([Marriott and Pitardi, 2024](#)).
- Some evidence suggests using AI for social interaction may cause dependence and addiction, whilst eroding users' skills or motivation to form and maintain human relationships ([Muldoon and Mullally, 2025](#)).





Loneliness: What helps?



What can help?

There is no 'quick fix' to loneliness, but learnt practices, behaviours, and community connection should be built into one's lifestyle

Social prescribing can reduce loneliness and isolation by engendering an ongoing desire and confidence to connect with others (Liebman et al., 2022)





What can help?

Psychological interventions to develop social and relationship skills and cognitive behavioural techniques for modifying negative beliefs about relationships are effective in reducing loneliness in the short and long term

(Hickin et al., 2021; Eccles and Qualter, 2021; Veronese et al. 2021)





What can help?

Advice for Young People

Focus on self-love.

Spending time alone might not seem fun, but the more time you spend doing things you enjoy and being kind to yourself the more confident you will feel. It's ok to have time just for yourself.

(Young Minds, 2022)





What can help? *Advice for Young People*

Peer Support

Look for community-led or identity-based groups. Seek spaces that understand and recognise your background and experiences.





What can help?

Supporting Diverse Communities

Create safe and inclusive spaces

Provide culturally competent support, tailored to individuals' backgrounds and respecting their experience.

Address Stigma

Facilitate conversations around loneliness and mental health, use respectful language, and challenge gently.

Reduce access barriers.

Meet communities 'where they are at' and involve communities in designing services.

(Lyons et al., 2025)





What can help?

Advice for Parents and Carers

Low pressure social opportunities

Lonely young people paradoxically avoid social contact with others ([Matthews et al., 2022](#))

Listen, understand, and support meaningful low pressure social interaction ([Lovell and Webber, 2024](#))





What can help?

Advice for Education Providers

‘Efforts to reduce adolescent loneliness must extend beyond individual- or relationship- focused interventions to encompass the wider environments in which young people are embedded’ ([Verity et al., 2025, p.4](#)).





What can help?

Advice for Education Providers

Inclusive Policies

School-level policies on diversity, inclusion, transition, and anti-bullying are crucial structural factors in mitigating loneliness

(Jefferson et al., 2023)





What can help?

Advice for Education Providers

Coproduction

Co-production with young people is essential to ensure relevance, accessibility, uptake and effectiveness of the approach ([Eager et al., 2024](#)).



The CoRAY Project with the Charlie Waller Trust

- Managing change and uncertainty
- **Feeling lonely, isolated and disconnected**
- Feeling bored, flat and unmotivated
- Seeking help for mental health
- Feeling anxious around social situations

Resource packs for teachers to use with KS3, KS4 and those with additional learning needs

Downloadable resource pack for parents and carers

<https://charliewaller.org/mental-health-resources/coray-mental-health-lesson-plans>





The Charlie Waller Trust

We provide training and mental health resources for:



Learn more at charliewaller.org



Webinar Feedback

Let us know how we did and help us to plan future webinars by completing this short survey



<https://eu-ln.sprw.ai/stt-S0F9E>



Upcoming webinars

Low Mood in Young People

Tuesday 12 May 2026, 12.30pm - 1.30pm

Clinical Associate Professor Laura Pass will be explaining what an evidence-based treatment for adolescent depression, called Brief Behavioural Activation, can tell us all about how to best support young people struggling with their mood.

Charlie Waller Workplace series

How to manage your wellbeing during times of change and uncertainty

Thursday 28 May 12:30

How to have conversations about mental health at work

Wed 10 June 12.30



And more

charliewaller.org/mental-health-training-support/mental-health-webinars



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