

Loneliness: College Counselling Blog #4

I often find that loneliness is difficult to talk about, it can be hard to admit that we feel lonely. We might worry that people will judge us, that they'll think being lonely means we don't have friends. But the truth is that all of us feel lonely at some point in our lives, and with the way things are at the moment, the length of time we've now spent in lockdown or isolation, more people than ever are suffering. They say that 1 in 4 of us is experiencing loneliness during lockdown, I wouldn't be surprised if it's quite a bit higher than that. And even in normal times (not lockdown), many people experience feelings of loneliness.

So, loneliness is normal...why don't we talk about it more? Why is it a bit of a taboo subject? I wonder if it's because the word lonely is often used along with 'sad' – and nobody wants to be seen as 'sad and lonely', do we? But feeling lonely doesn't mean we're sad, it certainly doesn't mean we don't have friends – it doesn't even mean that we're alone. I could be in a houseful of people or surrounded by friends (well, not at the moment, obviously!) and still feel lonely...it's a very personal thing. And that's something else that maybe makes it difficult to talk about – it is very *personal*, and everyone's experience is completely different – so will anyone understand? What might be 'relaxing peace and quiet' on one day, could be 'painfully lonely on another'. It's a confusing thing!

But the good news is that, not only is it 'normal', but also, we can try to do something with it.

The first step, as always, is acknowledging that 'this is what I'm feeling'. That doesn't mean you have to tell someone else, just accepting it for yourself is the first step – if you then choose to share that with someone else (friend, family or counsellor), that's up to you. Then ask yourself 'what do I need?' it's quite possible that at the moment you might not be able to get that (a hug, seeing someone I miss, going out with friends), but knowing what you need, and hearing that are really important. Someone is listening...even if it's just you!

Maybe ask yourself 'what can I do instead?'

Can I talk to someone and explain how I'm feeling, let myself be listened to.

Can I connect in a different way? Watch a movie together and chat online at the same time, play a game, share something...what will give me that feeling of connection?

Can I find something different to do? Listen to a Podcast (listening to another voice can be comforting), learn something or even hearing of other people experiencing the same so I don't feel so alone.

Would writing about how I feel help? (See the previous Blog about Journaling).

And remember, the counselling Team are here if you want to talk to one of us and share your feelings – we can't fix this situation, but what we can and will do, is listen to you.

counsellorreferral@nptcgroup.ac.uk

Just email us.