

**All our emotions are important**

Breaking the silence about  
youth loneliness



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Foundation

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"Tell them that youth loneliness exists. Tell them that we need to be able to talk about it without being ashamed of it. Tell them it's a real thing that really, really hurts. It's painful. But it might not be the worst thing, and it does not need to go on forever. It can come to an end."

42nd Street's young co-researchers

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# Introduction

## Youth loneliness is widespread, but not widely understood.

16 to 24 year olds feel lonely more often than any other age group<sup>1,2</sup>. Although there is growing recognition that people experience loneliness at different stages of life, there have been limited efforts to understand in depth how it affects young people.

That's why the Co-op Foundation launched Belong, our UK-wide network of partners committed to learning more about youth loneliness and working together to find effective solutions.

To do this, we need above all to listen to young people.

This report presents the results of an ICM survey of 2,000 young people across the UK. We also draw on the findings of 'Loneliness Connects Us', a creative, youth-led research project carried out by our partners Manchester Metropolitan University and 42nd Street. These two complementary studies offer significant statistical and qualitative insights into young people's feelings and experiences. And together, they start to point the way towards a new approach to youth loneliness.

It's clear from our research that loneliness is a stigmatised issue for young people. It is vital that we overcome this. How can we help young people understand loneliness not as an illness to be treated, but as a normal human emotion - a natural urge that reminds us to invest in our friendships and find strength in our communities?

Feeling lonely can be an intensely personal experience. But we need to break the silence. The more young people are confident to talk about loneliness, the more they can support each other and shape the solutions we must develop as a society.

That requires all of us to show that we are willing to listen. We hope this report helps to start the national conversation we need about youth loneliness.

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"Loneliness means something different to everyone because everyone experiences things differently. But I don't think people should be afraid of loneliness. All your emotions are important... if you're lonely it means you're missing out on something, you need that social connection"

(Patience, aged 20)

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<sup>1</sup> Co-op/British Red Cross (2016), Trapped in a bubble. See [coop.co.uk/loneliness](https://coop.co.uk/loneliness)

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office (2017), Community Life Survey 2016-17. See [gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey](https://gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey)



# Executive summary

The majority of young people see loneliness affecting their peer group - 65% of them agree it's a problem. But fewer than one in five believe youth loneliness is taken seriously as a social issue.

As a result, young people lack the confidence to talk about loneliness, often through fear of how people will react. They feel ashamed, and worry about being judged or placing a burden on others. Young women report higher levels of concern about these feelings, although young women and young men can each experience different pressures that affect how they respond to loneliness.

The impact of technology on youth loneliness is mixed. Young people have concerns about how they feel they need to present themselves on social media, and how they perceive other people's online lives. Young women again seem particularly affected by this. But young people also see positive opportunities for online connection, especially where it enhances face-to-face contact.

Although the majority are uncomfortable discussing loneliness, young people would rather confide in their peers than anyone else. Simple acts of friendship and kindness between young people can make a powerful difference. Young people are more open to reaching out to help a friend than they are to admitting they themselves need help, suggesting there may be significant untapped potential for peer-to-peer support.

But it's also important to have support from other sources. Youth services can provide a vital line of defence against loneliness, particularly for more vulnerable young people. A troubling finding of our survey is that those who are more socially and economically disadvantaged seem more reluctant to turn to others for help, whether peers, family or professionals.

Group activities based on shared interests are the most popular solution to youth loneliness. Having a trusted person to talk to privately is also important, as is making purposeful use of time spent alone. Keeping a healthy balance between positive individual and group activities seems crucial.

Based on our findings, we call for a new approach that will help young people understand loneliness as a normal human experience, and equip them to navigate and manage it, both individually and collectively.

These are our recommendations.

## **For everyone**

- Show you care - encourage young people to talk, and listen with empathy
- Promote youth social action

## **For youth organisations**

- Find ways to talk about loneliness, and consider making it an explicit focus of programmes
- Teach digital skills, including 'soft skills' that help young people navigate social relationships online

## **For government**

- Deliver the Jo Cox Commission's calls to action
- Involve and listen to young people, to develop differentiated solutions for this age group

## **For funders**

- Targeted approaches should support transitions into adulthood
- Create the conditions for self-help and mutual solutions, including support for diverse youth activities and spaces in disadvantaged areas

## **For further research**

- Investigate socio-economic barriers to young people asking for help
- Evaluate the impact of preventative approaches.



## A silent problem

65%



of young people believe loneliness is a problem for people their age

## Barriers and pressures

81%



cite fear of people's reactions as a barrier to speaking about loneliness

## What might help?

4 times



Young people are four times as likely to feel comfortable reaching out to a friend who seems lonely, than admitting they often feel lonely themselves

19%



Less than one in five feel youth loneliness is taken seriously as a social issue

Lower income



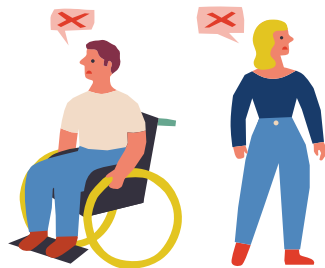
Young people from lower-income groups are less comfortable asking for help

61%



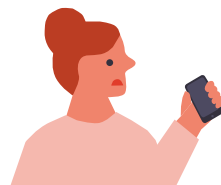
say that group activities would be helpful for a young person feeling lonely

9%



Less than one in ten think young people feel confident talking about loneliness

Young women



Young women worry more about how others will react if they say they are lonely, and are more affected by pressures on social media

43%



think online communities are helpful for lonely young people

# An invisible wall

## The silent sadness of youth loneliness

Loneliness is not simply about being alone. It's a subjective feeling we have when our social relationships are not as many or as meaningful as we would like.

This means that it can be hard to know if someone is lonely. Only 15% of young people in our survey thought it would be easy to tell if someone they knew was feeling lonely. But when they consider their peer group as a whole, almost two-thirds (65%) agree that loneliness is a problem.

In many cases though, the problem remains unspoken. More than half (55%) of young people said they had been aware of a peer who had been feeling lonely in the last year. Yet little more than a quarter (27%) had specifically spoken about it.

As few as 9% of young people think that loneliness is something people of their age feel confident talking about. And six in ten (60%) would be at least slightly uncomfortable\* telling someone they regularly feel lonely.

\*between 1 and 4 out of 10, where 1 is extremely uncomfortable and 10 is extremely comfortable

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"Home is overcrowded. I feel like there's an invisible wall between me and my family. I feel that I'm different - too different, put it that way. We all get on but they don't understand me."

(Sumaiya, aged 23)

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# What causes youth loneliness?

Loneliness is often linked to times of transition.<sup>3</sup> And of course, young people go through lots of big life changes in fairly quick succession. 'Being new' and first-time experiences were recurring themes in 'Loneliness Connects Us' (Manchester Metropolitan University and 42nd Street's youth co-research project).

For many, these transitional feelings of loneliness may only be temporary. But for those also struggling with other issues, the pressure to succeed and 'fit in' can lead to more problematic chronic loneliness. These may include young people facing economic insecurity, or grappling with identity issues and feeling they may not be accepted for who they are.

## Poverty and precarity

"With seasonal work... they get all the staff for the holiday camps for example at the same time, and if you miss those three days, because you are ill or something, you can't get the work and you are on your own all summer. Doing nothing. Just staying in all the time. Watching telly. Then in winter [it's] like a ghost town with no work at all."

Pete, aged 18

<sup>3</sup> Co-op/British Red Cross (2016).

## Identity and being 'different'

"When I left school I started to question my gender and sexuality. I grew up in the care system but last year I moved into a supported accommodation place. It's really hard and I'm not being looked after. Everything feels overwhelming... I am frightened about being alone and I'm also frightened about the area I'm living. I feel like I'm living in a mainly Muslim area and I'm not Muslim. I'm frightened of going to college as I don't think they will accept me. I am very, very lonely."

George, aged 17

## Pressure to succeed and feelings of failure

"There can be so much disappointment and loneliness because we are encouraged to aspire and have ambitions and then what happens when we fail... So who are you now? Who do you connect with? Old connections are broken. Who do you turn to? Not your family because you don't want to add to their sense of disappointment."

Patience, aged 20

## Transitions and first-time experiences

"When my boyfriend dumped me I wanted to kill myself. I felt so alone in the world. I was 17. I had just left my High School and I was going to start at sixth form college. I ended up taking an overdose in the summer holidays. I was OK. Everybody said it was a cry for help, but after that I carried on being very depressed and I hated college. I didn't make any friends for ages... Things are better for me now. I passed my 'A' Levels and went away to University and I have made some good friends now."

Emily, aged 23



# The label of loneliness

## Why don't young people talk about it?



"It's the label of loneliness that's the problem. If it's just 'I was doing that by myself' then it's ok. But if you call it loneliness or say you are lonely, it's like 'whoah'. Something kicks in... and they think it's so simple, if you're lonely go and make some mates... so why are you lonely?"

Young co-researcher

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Young people recognise loneliness as a problem. In fact almost all of them (95%) agree it affects people no matter what their age. But they don't feel youth loneliness is taken seriously by society. Our survey found that only 19% believe it's treated as a serious social issue. This compares to 72% who think that loneliness among older people is taken seriously.

This perception feeds into a widespread fear amongst young people of how others will react if they admit to feeling lonely. Four in five (81%) say that they would worry about being embarrassed, mocked, judged or treated differently.

This leaves young people not only 'bottling things up', but blaming themselves for a feeling which they believe society brands as a personal failing.

"The stereotypical view is that loneliness is your fault; you've done something wrong... and so now you're lonely."

Young co-researcher

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"To be seen as lonely is to be seen as though there's something wrong with you. If you say I'm lonely it's admitting you're not having a good time and everyone is in this like competition to be having the most fun. Then if you admit you're lonely it makes you feel even more isolated."

Karina, aged 20

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But it's not just their own feelings young people are worried about. Concern for others is also a significant barrier to talking about loneliness. More than two-thirds (69%) say that not wanting to make friends and family feel guilty, or to burden them with their worries, would prevent them from talking about feeling lonely.

"It's hard to talk [about loneliness] cos it puts pressure on others to be there for you"

Gil, aged 23

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# Gender and Loneliness

Young women tend to report higher levels of anxiety about how others will react if they say that they are lonely. They are also more likely to keep feelings of loneliness to themselves so as not to make others feel guilty or worried.

“My mum has this standard, what a girl should be, and I don’t get it. I’ve just got brothers so I don’t have a sister or someone I can relate to. I can talk to my friends but I find them self-absorbed... And their goals, to get married and settle down are very different to mine.”

Fatima, Manchester

### ‘Man up and deal with it’

Young men can also face gendered pressures and challenges that affect how they experience and respond to loneliness.

“I went to an all-boys school and I became a very aggressive person.... because it was a matter of deciding to be violent to them before they were violent to you... Now I’m like a shell... I just go through life. I’m numb 24/7. Things happen, some of it’s bad, some good. I just go straight through it. I’ve always had that mentality, just man up and deal with it... you’re on your own. It’s only coming here [to 42nd Street] the last few years that I’ve learned to open up.”

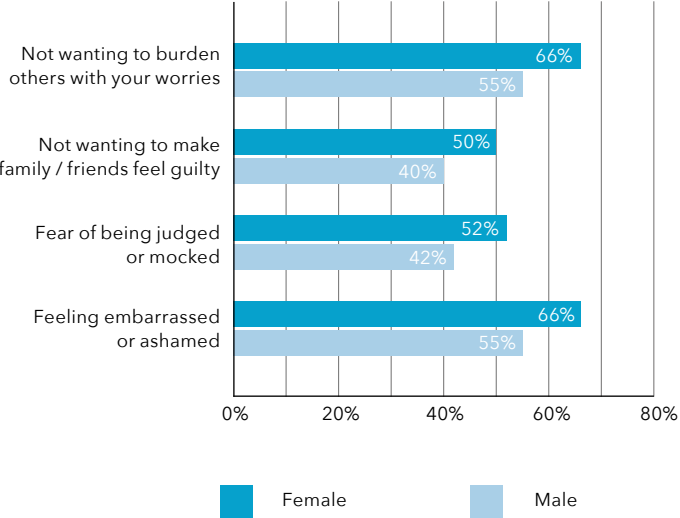
Mark, aged 25

There is often a tension where male ‘banter’ and humour can be aggressive and hurtful at times, but can also enable social bonding.

“Aye, he’s my pal... he’s a weird kinda pal cos we fight all the time, but he’s always watching my back, he’s there for me”

Joe, aged 16

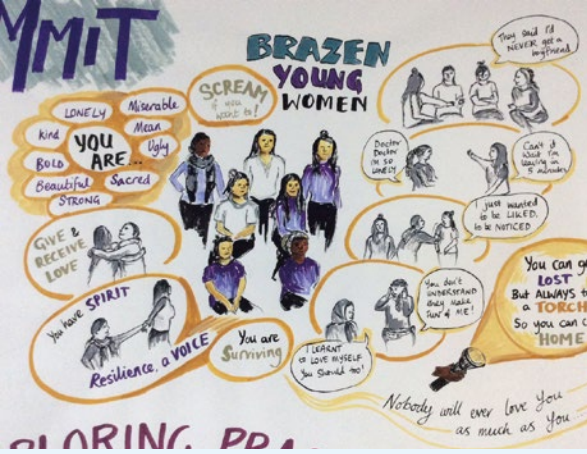
### What would prevent you from talking to someone about feeling lonely?



## Belong case study

Clean Break’s ‘Brazen’ young women’s group uses theatre as a tool to open up discussion about loneliness in a safe environment. The group have gone on to develop a podcast and a public performance about young women’s experiences of loneliness.

Participants now feel much more confident dealing with the issue and have bonded as a mutually supportive peer community.



# Online friendship or "fake happiness"?

## Technology and youth loneliness

### Social media and social pressure

The role of technology, and social media in particular, is often questioned in relation to loneliness. For young people, who have grown up in the digital age, there are definitely challenges and concerns. For example, our survey found that 69% say they sometimes feel lonely if they see others having fun online without them.

Young people describe the pressure to portray 'perfect' lives on social media no matter how they are really feeling.

"Social media is social pressure... people posting fake happiness. That has to be one of the loneliest places, with so much inner unhappiness and faking it online. So all your connections are based on falseness."

Rosa, aged 18

"Online, happiness is compulsory. Looking happy online with a drink in your hand. You can't say: this is really hard and I'm missing you."

Patience, aged 20

This is another aspect of youth loneliness where girls and women seem to be vulnerable to particular pressures - whether it's the need for 'likes' as validation, or the risk of judgement if seen to be 'oversharing', perhaps while trying to create that perfect online persona.

"She's one of those girls... she's got 'only god can judge me' on her profile pic... but then she's posting posing in the toilets with her friends all the time."

Mo, aged 25

Young women were much more likely to agree that taking a 'detox' from sites like Instagram would be helpful for dealing with loneliness (43%, compared to 32% of young men).

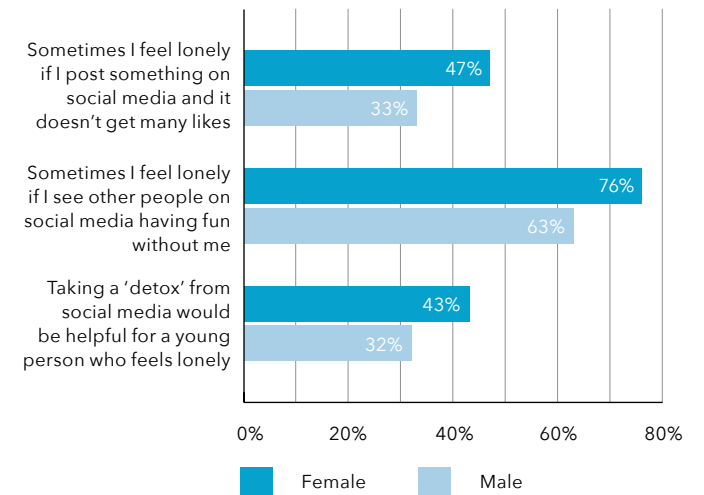
However, some young men also report similar pressures, which can have harmful consequences.

"Technically I'm destroying my body through alcohol... but if I post it what does it mean to other people? It's like the likes. I'm addicted to likes. You get that quick little buzz then you question it. Question the way I behaved... [but] we live in a society that idolises celebs and all they do is post pictures of them doing drugs and drink and all that."

Mark, aged 25



Social media and loneliness responses by gender



### Opportunities for connection

Despite this, technology also presents positive opportunities for friendship and connection. 43% of young people say that joining an online community could be helpful to reduce loneliness. Finding meaningful friendships online can be particularly valued by those who may feel marginalised within the places where they live.

*"I have found online friendship and support as a trans\* young person exploring my gender and also as someone with autism in a way that I would never have found possible. I am not 'out' anywhere except here in this youth group and online. It has saved my life."*

Elsie, aged 19

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Young people are also taking advantage of technology to connect with others and enhance 'real life' interaction, rather than replacing it. Nearly half (48%) say that social media and messaging apps stop them from feeling lonely because they know that their friends are just a click away. In the following anecdote, it's particularly striking how using smartphones not only enabled a new friendship to start, but actually disrupted what was seen as a less effective 'institutional' solution to loneliness.

*"My school has a support hub where pupils can go if they are feeling lonely. But you can't go there. It's the last place you can go. No one would use that if they were feeling lonely. So this girl started school and she was new and only spoke Portuguese. At that time I didn't have many friends ... I got friendly with this girl who only spoke Portuguese. So she couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Portuguese. But we use Google Translate on our phones to talk to one another."*

Faith, aged 16

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## Case study

The Digital Life Skills Company believes that the 'digital divide' is no longer just about access - it's about digital savvy. Many young people are not as digitally adept as the often-used term 'digital native' suggests - they might know how to use social media, but not how to navigate social relationships online or how to control their personal information. This new social enterprise provides workshops to help young people develop 'soft' digital skills, including protecting privacy, coping with peer pressure and dealing with digital distraction. These skills could provide important protection against some of the online risks of loneliness highlighted by our research.



# Who do you turn to?

## Offering and asking for support

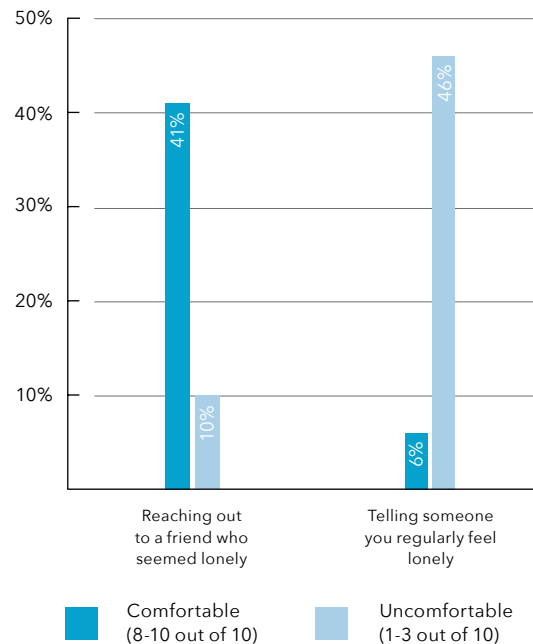
Although young people are generally uncomfortable discussing loneliness, they are a community-minded generation.

Research by the #iwill campaign classifies a third (34%) of 10-20 year olds as being highly committed to activities like volunteering, fundraising or campaigning, with another half (49%) potentially interested in taking up or doing more social action.<sup>4</sup>

This is not purely altruism. Good quality youth social action has a double benefit, making a positive impact on the young people who take part, as well as others in their community. Through the Co-op Foundation #iwill fund, we're helping tackle youth loneliness by providing social action opportunities as a way to strengthen young people's social connections and build resilience.

Would young people be open to forms of social action that address youth loneliness more explicitly? Our survey suggests they might. They are more than four times as likely to feel comfortable reaching out to a friend who seemed lonely, compared to admitting they regularly feel lonely themselves. And previous Co-op research found that 16-24s are significantly more likely than other age groups to agree that there are everyday actions people can take to address loneliness.<sup>5</sup>

How comfortable or uncomfortable would you feel...



The potential for mutual support between young people is further indicated by their responses when asked who, if anyone, they would feel comfortable talking to about feeling lonely. 81% selected a peer, such as a friend, partner, classmate or colleague. 50% mentioned a family member, while 30% thought they might talk to a teacher, youth worker or other professional.

Small, simple actions taken by young people to reach out to their peers can make a big difference.

"I was at a gig by myself and this guy just came up and said, you're here by yourself and I'm here by myself. Why don't we hang out together and then we aren't by ourselves."

Clayton, aged 21

"I was sitting there by myself. I didn't have anyone to talk to and I didn't know what to do. Then my friend came up to me. She pretended she couldn't open this box of chocolates. She said, 'I don't know how to open this. Please can you help me?' I laughed and said, 'I don't know how to do this. Please can you help me?' We both fell about."

Rosa, aged 18

Siblings may also be an under-used source of support. In Loneliness Connects Us, older teens often showed concern for the welfare of their younger brothers and sisters. Yet fewer than a third of young people in our survey (29%) specifically selected a sibling as someone they'd be comfortable talking to about loneliness. Having a range of sources of support, including from family members, may reduce the risk of dependency on potentially harmful social influences from trying to fit in with a peer group.

<sup>4</sup> #iwill/Ipsos MORI (2016), National Youth Social Action Survey 2016. See [iwill.org.uk](http://iwill.org.uk)  
<sup>5</sup> Co-op/British Red Cross (2016).



“My parents don’t know but my brother started smoking last week, just trying to fit in. He doesn’t fit in anywhere else. I know that he is frightened of being on his own and it causes really bad anxiety so smoking lets him be part of something. I suppose he hopes if he smokes he won’t stand out, he won’t be the one who always has his headphones on. So he hangs around with the smoking group, but I think he still feels alone. I’m really worried about him.”

Annie, aged 17 (talking about 12-year-old brother)

Youth services also provide a vital line of defence against loneliness - particularly for the most vulnerable who may lack strong support from friends or family.

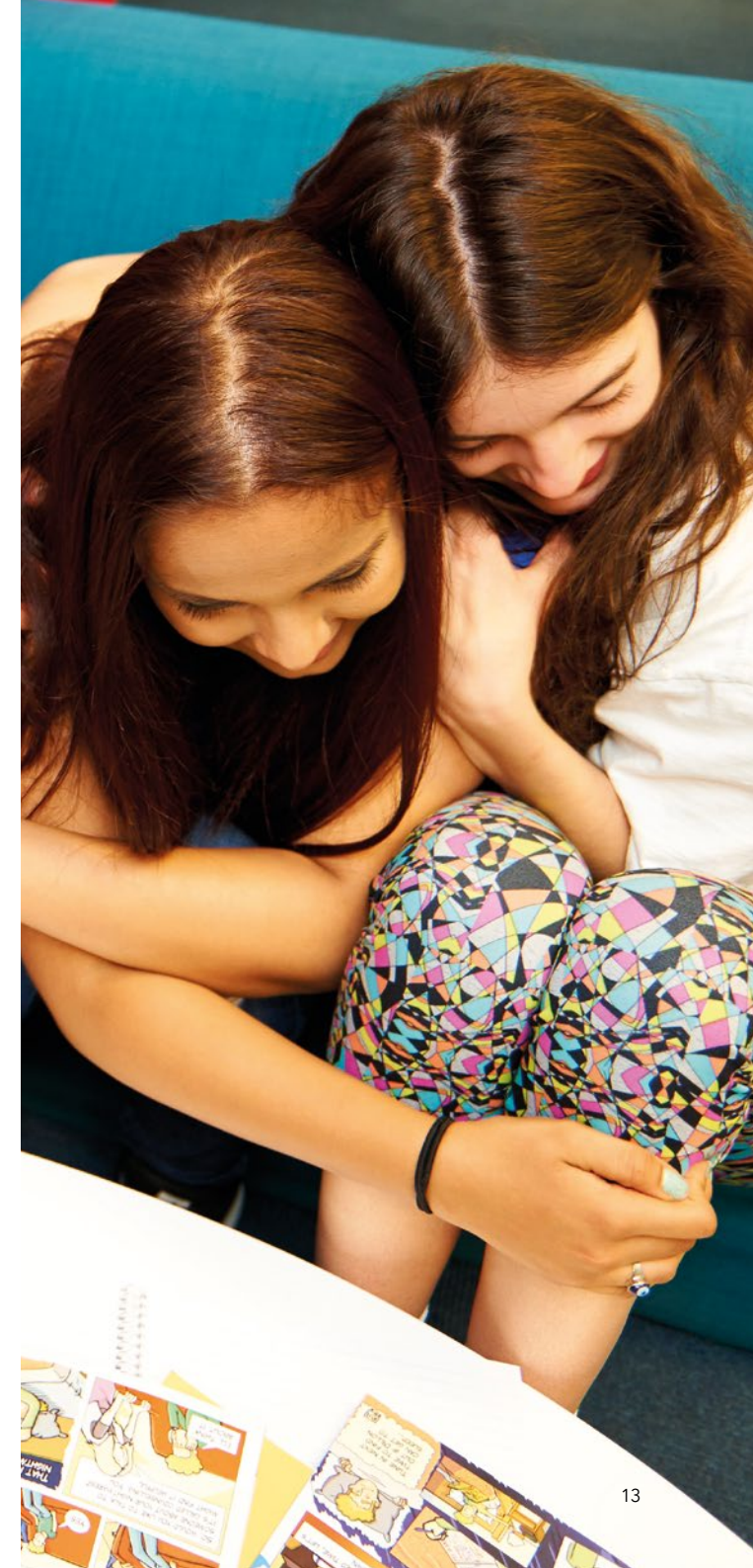
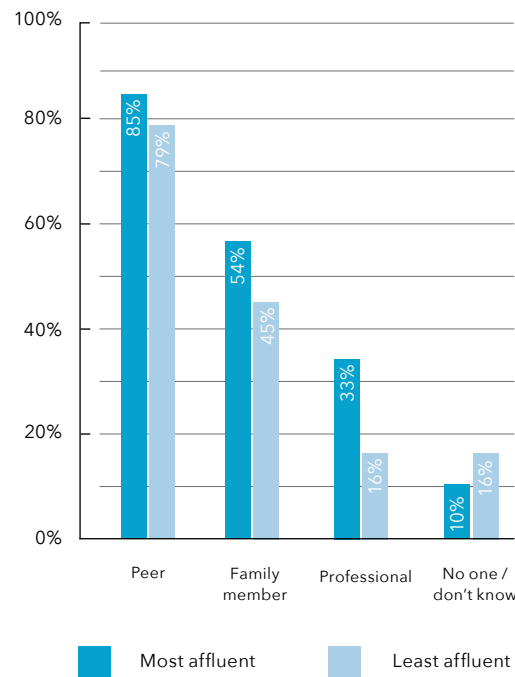
“Thank you [youth worker] for just talking to me and treating me like any other person... You made me feel welcome and comfortable (and ‘normal’) at a time when I felt like no one understood, and you’ll probably never know how much that helped me. Thank you for believing me and supporting me when I came to you for help... You didn’t make a big deal out of it, but made sure I knew that I had your support.”

Anonymous, Manchester

### Asking for help - a socio-economic divide

Across all potential sources of support - peers, family or professionals - our survey reveals a consistent trend: young people from lower income groups are less comfortable confiding in others about being lonely. We don’t yet fully understand the reasons behind this, but it’s clear that efforts to help young people find connection and belonging should try to understand and take account of any socio-economic barriers.

Who, if anyone, would you feel comfortable talking to about feeling lonely?



# Knowing someone's there for you

## What could help?

### Group activities

Taking part in group activities, such as team sports or going to music events, is the most popular solution that young people identify for dealing with loneliness. 61% think that activities like this would be helpful for a lonely young person. Enjoying shared interests together can provide a simple way to make new friends, for example after moving to a new city.

"No-one else from my family has ever been to university and no-one else lives over here. I didn't know anyone and I knew I had to do something to get out of my room so eventually I joined a football team."

Danny, aged 23

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Opportunities to take part in group activities need to be accessible to all young people. And particularly in the light of the additional barriers experienced by lower income groups, efforts should be made to maintain or increase youth provision in more disadvantaged communities, and make sure it is as affordable as possible.

### Talking to a trusted person

52% of young people say that talking privately with a trusted person would help reduce loneliness.

"Knowing someone's there for you. And you can be real with them, not fake."

Young co-researcher, on the importance of friendship

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That person might be a teacher or other adult - but given the strong preference young people show for confiding in others their own age, a key role for schools and youth services could be to promote and facilitate opportunities for peer support.

"Listening and paying attention at school is often about listening and paying attention to the teacher and not much support is given to people learning to listen to one another."

Kathy, aged 20

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### Time together and time alone - keeping a healthy balance

In a world that may seem to present almost constant opportunities for 'connection' - though often through virtual channels - it's interesting that young people see 'finding ways to be comfortable being alone' as a key part of the solution to youth loneliness. This might involve solitary but positive hobbies like reading or going for walks. 58% of them think this type of activity would be helpful for a lonely young person. Perhaps this is seen as an antidote to the pressure to appear busy, connected and successful, or the potentially harmful urge to spend time with other people at any cost.

"Is there a word for hanging around with people you don't like but do cos you don't want to be by yourself?"

Mark, aged 25

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Creativity is a popular vehicle for young people to spend time alone purposefully, and to manage feelings of loneliness. But they also caution that a healthy balance of interaction with others should be maintained.

"You may get to a boundary where the loneliness is beginning to affect your health and then a persistent negative train of thought is setting in... I wrote and posted my own poems as a way of looking after myself."

Sumaiya, aged 23

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"You could be a genius as an artist or a poet and still need help and reassurance in the everyday."

Clayton, aged 21

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## Belong case studies

### **Tackling loneliness through peer support and social action**

Youth Focus: North East are developing a young volunteers network to help people who are feeling lonely or left out at certain times of the year, like Valentine's Day, school prom, Christmas or birthdays. The youth work charity also provides open-access drop-in sessions for young people to meet and make new friends year-round.

'Feeling different' can contribute to loneliness. The Proud Trust in Manchester works with LGBT+ young people from diverse backgrounds, including those from black, asian and minoritised ethnic and religious communities. They train 'allies' to help young people feel accepted and supported at school and in their communities.



### **Creative and artistic approaches**

Loneliness can be a difficult topic to discuss; creative arts can be effective for engaging young people with the issue. Make Some Noise is running music workshops in schools in Stoke-on-Trent. Young people can explore loneliness through music and then work together to develop performances for other students and their families, reducing stigma around the issue.

Ovalhouse's play 'Random Selfies' (main picture) tells the story of Loretta, 'a lonely girl in a busy world'. The script was developed by award-winning playwright Mike Kenny, with input from young people who shared their experiences of loneliness in a series of workshops. The play is performed for school groups as a way of opening up discussion of this topic.

# Conclusions

Most young people agree that loneliness is a problem for their age group. Despite this, it remains largely unspoken. Our research suggests several reasons behind this silence.

## **Young people don't see youth loneliness as taken seriously by society.**

A relative lack of focus by policy-makers and services on how loneliness affects young people (in contrast with efforts to tackle the issue in later life) may cause them to worry that their feelings lack legitimacy.

## **Loneliness can feel like a personal failing.**

Young people face a range of pressures - whether it's achieving in education, fitting in socially, conforming to gender roles, or portraying a certain image online. Admitting to loneliness can be bound up in feelings of embarrassment and failure linked to the many expectations which are placed on them.

## **They don't want to be a burden or a disappointment**

Concern for how it might affect others if they admitted to being lonely is another strong barrier that can make young people keep their feelings bottled up.

But our findings also offer hope of the opportunity for change. Young people are open to reaching out and helping others who are lonely - even if they might not ask for help themselves. And they would rather confide

in their peers than anyone else, although adults (as both family members and professionals) also have an important role to play.

## **If we can break down the 'invisible wall' that stops young people talking about loneliness, we can help more of them discover and release the untapped potential for mutual support and solidarity.**

This calls for a different way of thinking about youth loneliness. Whereas loneliness in later life is increasingly regarded as a public health issue, framing young people's experience of loneliness in medical terms might only reinforce the sense of shame and stigma many of them feel.

Instead, more should be done to help young people to:

- understand loneliness as a normal experience, and a legitimate feeling for them to express
- have access to a range of group activities and trusted individuals to talk to
- develop resilience and life skills - from making positive use of time alone, to becoming more 'savvy' in how they use social media
- have opportunities to help others through social action, as an empowering way of strengthening their character, confidence and sense of belonging.





# Recommendations



## For everyone

### Show you care

Be aware of youth loneliness, encourage young people to talk about how they feel, and listen to them with empathy.

### Promote youth social action

The #iwill campaign ([www.iwill.org.uk](http://www.iwill.org.uk)) has resources for all types of organisations and individuals who want to help young people get involved in positive activities with a double-benefit for themselves and their communities.

## For youth organisations

### Talk about loneliness

You might already run programmes that prevent or reduce youth loneliness, but have you considered making this an explicit aim of your activities? Providers of youth social action opportunities could consider helping participants explore loneliness and develop youth-led solutions. Loneliness can be a difficult subject to talk about - visit [belonglearning.blog](http://belonglearning.blog) for examples of how others are approaching this.

### Teach digital skills

Young people need a rounded set of 'digital life skills' to help them navigate the emotional challenges of social media. But as well as the pitfalls of the internet we should recognise its opportunities, and equip those who are growing up with the unintended negatives of today's technology with the skills to design better digital solutions for tomorrow.

## For Government

### Deliver the Jo Cox Commission's call to action

We support the commission's recommendations on tackling loneliness across all ages, including national indicators, developing the evidence base, new funding and a 'family and relationships test' for policies<sup>6</sup>. We welcome the UK Government's commitment to a loneliness strategy, and similar steps being taken in devolved nations.

### Involve and listen to young people

Within these strategies, a differentiated approach to youth loneliness should be informed by the voice and experiences of young people. Not only will this help make sure specific policy solutions are effective, it may start to overturn young people's sense that youth loneliness is not taken seriously - itself is a key contributor to the problem.



<sup>6</sup> Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness (2016), A call to action. See [jocoxloneliness.org](http://jocoxloneliness.org)

## For funders interested in youth loneliness

### **Support transitions into adulthood**

Young adults aged up to 25 could be a suitable focus for new funding streams concerned with loneliness. This would complement current social action funding, which mainly targets 10-20 year olds. Those with additional challenges in the transition to adulthood, like having been in care or being disabled, could be particularly prioritised - although many young people at this age experience significant pressures related to work, personal identity or relationships.

### **Create the conditions for self-help and mutual solutions**

Loneliness is not an illness to be cured, but a universal experience which young people must learn to navigate and manage - individually and collectively, practically and emotionally. Rather than seeking discrete interventions to reduce loneliness, we call on other funders to join us in building the case for diverse youth activities and spaces that allow young people to be themselves and connect with others. Providing or maintaining such provision in disadvantaged communities must be a particular priority.

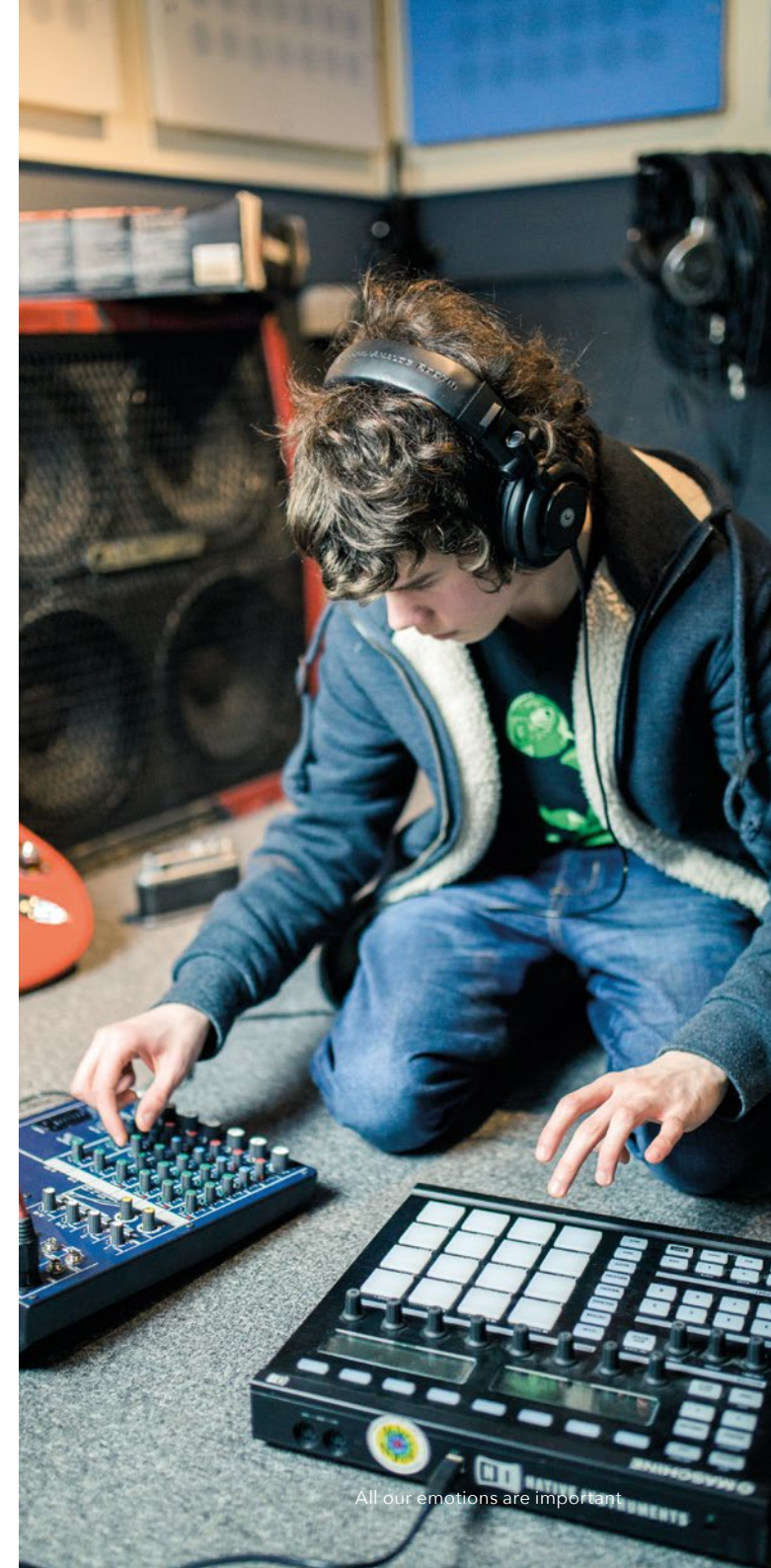
## For further research

### **Investigate socio-economic barriers**

More insights are needed into the reasons why young people from lower income groups seem more uncomfortable turning to peers, family and professionals for help in times of loneliness.

### **Evaluate the impact of prevention**

Much work to tackle youth loneliness will focus on preventing occasional, temporary feelings of loneliness from becoming chronic. Preventative activities can be harder to measure, but it is only with robust evidence that their value is likely to be recognised - and therefore adequately resourced.



All our emotions are important



# About the research



'Belong' is a UK-wide programme led by the Co-op Foundation, helping young people beat loneliness through co-operative action.

We're building a network of projects that help young people make stronger connections in their community. By working together, the partners in our network are contributing to local and national impact. Collectively, we aim to:

- Connect and empower 5,000 young people to take action to tackle loneliness
- Strengthen local youth services that provide vital support and opportunities
- Start a national conversation that breaks down the stigma about youth loneliness

For more information, see [coopfoundation.org.uk](http://coopfoundation.org.uk), email [foundation@coop.co.uk](mailto:foundation@coop.co.uk) or follow us on Twitter [@Coop\\_Foundation](https://twitter.com/Coop_Foundation)

## Youth Loneliness survey

Unless otherwise stated, statistics used in this report refer to the Co-op Foundation/ICM youth loneliness survey. Fieldwork was completed by ICM, the specialist social research division of Walnut. ICM interviewed a representative sample of 2,001 16-25 year olds living in the UK. Fieldwork was conducted online between the 24th and 26th of January 2018. To ensure a representative sample, during fieldwork demographic quotas were applied, and at the analysis stage data was weighted by age, gender, region.

ICMUnlimited...

## Loneliness Connects Us

All quotations in the report are taken from Loneliness Connects Us: Young People Exploring and Experiencing Loneliness and Friendship. This project was carried out by Manchester Metropolitan University and 42nd Street, funded by the Co-op Foundation. It worked with a group of young co-researchers to develop the research aims and methods, and engaged 133 young people UK-wide in conversations about loneliness. For further details and full findings see <https://bit.ly/2EGVFPO>



## The #iwill Fund

Several of the project case studies featured in the report are supported by the Co-op Foundation #iwill fund. #iwill is a UK-wide campaign to get 6 out of 10 young people involved in social action by 2020. Social action involves activities like campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, which make a positive difference to communities while developing young people's skills. The #iwill fund is made possible thanks to £40 million joint funding from the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. £1 million from the #iwill fund will be matched by £1 million from the Co-op Foundation over 3 years.





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# Foundation

Co-op Foundation is a working name of Co-operative Community Investment Foundation, a charity registered in England and Wales (1093028) and Scotland (SC048102) Registered office: 1 Angel Square, Manchester M60 0AG

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