

# In this together

Young people's  
experiences of  
loneliness in the  
spring/summer  
2020 lockdown,  
and beyond



Foundation

# Introduction

In 2019, we asked a group of young people to create a new campaign that would help their friends and peers feel more confident talking about loneliness.

Inspired by our own [research](#)\* that found **80%** of young people cited others' reactions as a barrier to talking about loneliness, our brilliant young creatives joined forces to build [Lonely Not Alone](#) with one very simple ask: wear yellow socks to show you care about lonely young people.

**Yellow socks were their symbol of solidarity and friends, funded partners, colleagues and strangers alike embraced the co-operative values of solidarity and caring for others to take part.**

Our young co-designers are now back for the second year of our campaign and they're asking everyone to get involved once again. And this new research shows why we should.

Since last year's launch, the world has changed almost beyond recognition. The coronavirus pandemic has shut schools, colleges and youth groups for months on end; it's changed the way we communicate with each

other, maybe forever; and it's left young people feeling isolated and lonely as they've been cut off from friends, extended family and job and social opportunities.

'In This Together' will examine the impact of the spring/summer 2020 lockdown on young people aged 10 to 25 years old. It will look at what they missed out on, and what they think needs to happen next to help their friends and peers. It will also review in detail how young people feel about loneliness and stigma today, a year on from the first Lonely Not Alone campaign.

The Co-op Foundation has already supported thousands of young people to beat loneliness through our Belong programme. We hope this research will help funders, youth groups and families understand more about what we can all do to help. We're in this together, because youth loneliness matters.

## Methodology

Unless otherwise stated, statistics used in this report refer to the Co-op Foundation/Opinium Lonely Not Alone survey 2020. Fieldwork was completed by Opinium. Opinium surveyed a sample of 2,000 10 to 25-year-olds, representative of each age group (10 years, 11-12, 13-15, 16-18, 19-21, 22-25) living in the UK. Fieldwork was conducted between 18 August and 1 September 2020.

For our survey, we used the national loneliness measure recommended by the Office for National Statistics. Visit the [ONS website](#) for more information.

[\\*All Our Emotions Are Important](#), 2018



# 76%

of young people felt lonely at least occasionally during lockdown

# 58%

of young people said not seeing friends and family during lockdown made them feel lonely



## Loneliness in lockdown

### The impact of coronavirus

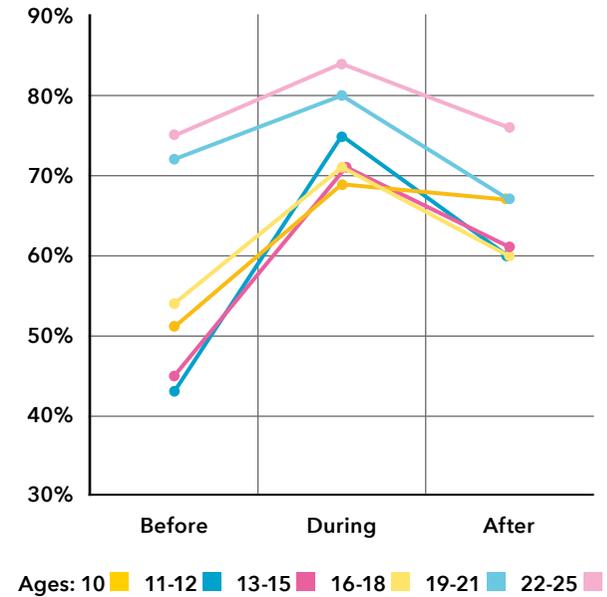
The coronavirus lockdown in spring/summer 2020 changed life for everyone, and the impact on young people has been particularly stark with loneliness rising across all age groups.

Three quarters (**76%**) of 10 to 25-year-olds we spoke to said they felt lonely during lockdown at least occasionally compared to **59%** before restrictions began. Levels of loneliness dropped after restrictions started to ease on July 4 but all but one age group (19 to 21-year-olds) reported they felt lonelier after this date than before lockdown began. See more on our graph, right.

The reasons for increased loneliness are wide-ranging but the highest instances of things that made young people feel lonely were linked to missing out on contact with others. More than half of young people who felt lonely during lockdown (**58%**) said not seeing friends and family made them feel this way while **44%** said not being able to go to school, university or work had an impact.

Looking in greater depth, we found that **78%** of 16 to 25-year-olds missed out life events and/or celebrations during lockdown, including going on holiday or traveling (**45%**), starting a new job or apprenticeship (**17%**), and going to a prom (**16%**). A third (**33%**) said missing out on life events or celebrations also made them feel lonely. **78%** of this age group felt at least one negative emotion as a result, like anger, sadness or loneliness.

### How levels of loneliness changed for young people during lockdown



# Let's talk loneliness

## Growing up is hard to do

Lockdown helped to bring loneliness back into the public consciousness. However, it's far from a new phenomenon, particularly for young people. Our 2018 report, [All Our Emotions](#), found that **65%** of young people felt loneliness was an issue for people their age.

'In This Together' has taken another look at young people's views on loneliness and found that **12%** of 10 to 25-year-olds say they feel lonely often or always while **71%** feel lonely at least occasionally. It's an issue that becomes worse with age with **19%** of 19 to 25-year-olds saying they feel lonely often/always compared to **6%** of 10 to 18-year-olds.

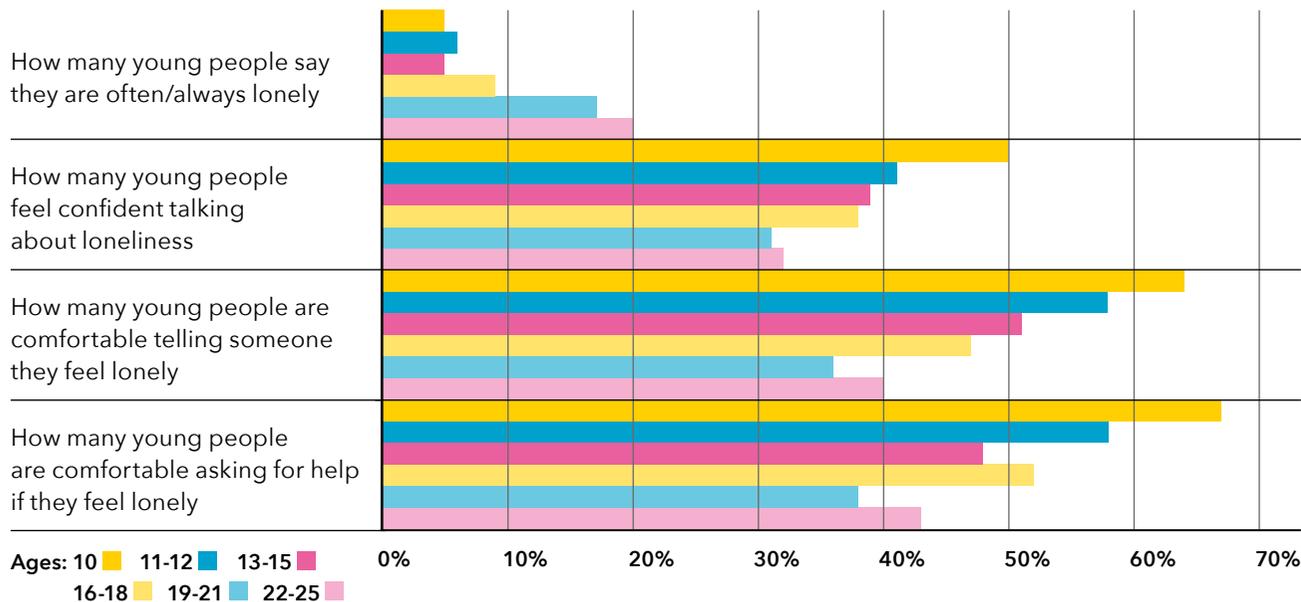
We know from our network of partners tackling youth loneliness that young people of all ages can also find it difficult talk about loneliness. This is borne out in our

research. Only **36%** of young people surveyed say they feel confident talking about loneliness while almost as many (**34%**) say they don't. It's a similar story when we asked young people how comfortable they felt asking for help if they felt lonely. More than a quarter (**27%**) said this would make them feel uncomfortable.

Age again has an impact. In total, **42%** of 10 to 18-year-olds felt confident talking about loneliness compared to just **31%** of 19 to 25-year-olds. Similarly, **20%** of 10 to 18-year-olds say they feel uncomfortable asking for help, rising to **35%** of 19 to 25-year-olds.

And finally, less than a quarter (**23%**) of young people believe society treats youth loneliness seriously, compared to **42%** of those who believe society treats loneliness among older people seriously.

## How young people's experiences of loneliness change with age



Opening up about loneliness is a challenge



Only  
**36%**

of young people feel confident talking about loneliness

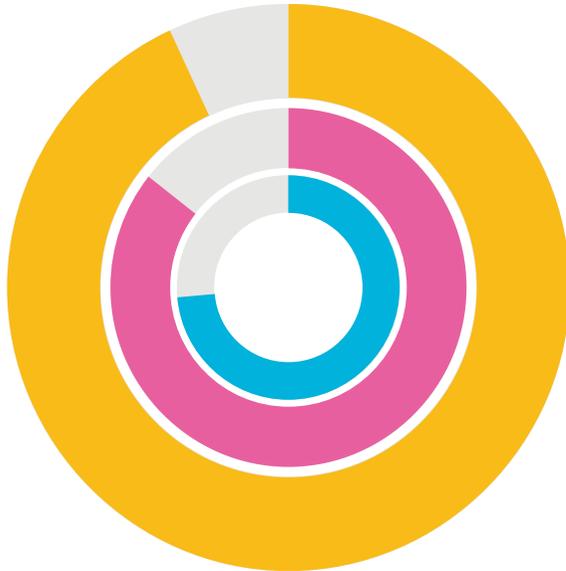
Just  
**23%**

of young people believe society treats youth loneliness seriously

**27%**

of young people would be uncomfortable asking for help if they felt lonely

## Taking action



**93%** of young people say they have ever felt lonely

**92%** of young people who have felt lonely have taken some type of action in response

**86%** of young people who've felt lonely and taken a response have found their action helpful

## Taking action to beat loneliness

If our [Lonely Not Alone](#) campaign has shown us anything, it's that young people are resourceful about tackling their own feelings of loneliness, and they want to help others, too.

This is backed up by our research. In total, **92%** of young people who have felt lonely at any time, have taken an action designed to help. The options chosen are wide ranging and include boosting personal interactions by spending more time with family (**39%**) or friends (**28%**) and altering their digital connections by spending more time online (**33%**) or spending online time in a more positive way (**24%**). Some young people also focused on their mindset with **22%** waiting for the feeling to pass and **17%** trying to see things in a more positive way.

The range of techniques tried by young people in our survey had differing levels of success. Those young people who looked to boost their personal interactions found the greatest improvement on their feelings of loneliness. **91%** said spending more time with family helped and **89%** said spending more time with friends was beneficial, too.

Overall, the most proactive actions were the most helpful, while the most passive ones, although popular, had little impact. Only **46%** of young people who said they waited for the feeling to pass found this approach helpful while **61%** of those who simply spent more time online also felt an improvement in their feelings of loneliness. This is not to say digital use was a problem per se. In fact, **80%** of those who used their online time in a more positive way reported this helped their feelings of loneliness, suggesting it's how the time is spent, and not just the amount of time, that is the deciding factor.



# In This Together

## How young people help others to feel less lonely

As a partner in the #iwill Campaign that aims to make social action a way of life for as many young people as possible, we know that peer support is an essential tool in tackling loneliness. Our survey shows that helping others is something young people are comfortable doing with **91%** of 10 to 25-year-olds agreeing this is the case.

Young people are most comfortable helping their friends. In total, **77%** would be comfortable offering support to a friend who they thought might be lonely while fewer (**51%**) would be comfortable getting

involved in their community to help other young people who might be lonely. See more in our graph below.

Our research also shows, however, that not all young people have had the opportunity to translate this into action with only a third (**33%**) saying they have offered support to a friend who they thought might be lonely. When asked about raising awareness of youth loneliness, just over half of young people (**52%**) said they would feel comfortable taking this action but only **8%** had, suggesting a campaign like **Lonely Not Alone** may be just what they're looking for.

Offering support to a friend who they think may be lonely

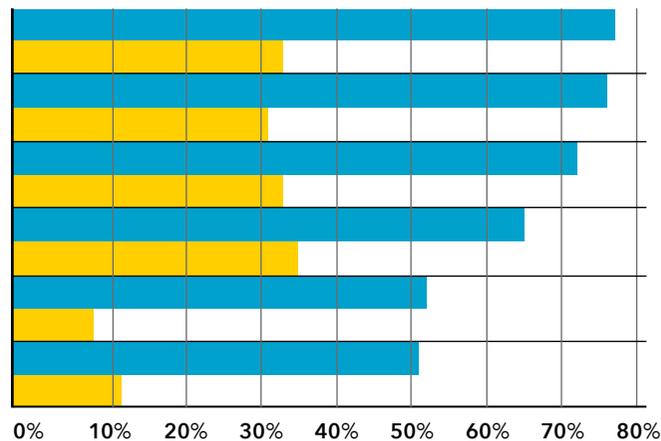
Supporting a friend who told them they felt lonely

Including someone in their friendship group who seemed lonely

Being friendly with someone outside of their friendship group who they think may be lonely

Taking action to help raise awareness of youth loneliness

Getting involved in their community to help other young people who might be lonely



Base: all young people

Would be comfortable doing ■ Have done ■

# 76%

of young people have taken an action to help others who feel lonely

## Things to help

The difficulties of the past six months have forced us all to think about what a new and better normal could look like. **75%** of the 10 to 25-year-olds we spoke to believe more should be done in society to help tackle loneliness in young people. Here are a few of their ideas\*:

Local buddy schemes to meet people of a similar age who have similar interests

More variety of free local activities

Access to online forums to meet people of a similar age who have similar interests

Job opportunities

Access to online courses to build skills

\* These are the five most popular responses to the question: 'What types of support do you think you, or others in your age group would benefit from to tackle feelings of loneliness?'

## Pull your yellow socks up!

Show lonely young people you care this year by wearing yellow socks and posting your 'Outfit of the Day' to social media with the hashtag **#OOTDYellowSocks**.

Alternatively, tag @lonelynotalone in a message of support on Twitter or Instagram.

Together, we can show young people that they may be lonely, but they're not alone.

