

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION – STARTING A CONVERSATION

Throughout our lives, we often experience moments of loneliness and isolation. For some, these experiences can result in substantial healing processes or thoughts of shame and moments of uncertainty. We are often taught that managing loneliness and isolation is an individual issue and forget the importance of community connection.

This tip sheet will help you understand the difference between loneliness and isolation. It will explore the importance of community connection and how advocating can be used as a tool to address these issues.

Loneliness

Most people throughout their life will experience moments of loneliness, this can present itself as feelings of sadness, distress about your identity or uncertainty. It is important to recognise that it is normal to experience moments of loneliness throughout our lives, however, when left unresolved, loneliness can impact a person negatively.

Loneliness can become problematic when it starts impacting a person's daily life. Loneliness can occur when a person is trying to connect to community and is struggling. This can lead to a negative impact on your physical, mental and social health.

“It’s a struggle because I don’t feel included a lot. It’s more than asking for my pronouns, it’s being able to choose when I disclose”

Isolation

For LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities, being separated from your community can be a real struggle that can lead to isolation. Isolation can occur due to a lack of community existing in your geographical environment, or the inability to connect with community due to access needs. An isolated person may develop, over time, social anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns. A connection to community fosters positive social, mental and physical health benefits.

Inclusive practice done well, is when an organisations ask what your access needs are and acts upon those needs

Mark is a bisexual man who has a visual impairment. He has called your service seeking advice. He informs you that he lives in rural Victoria and the only social spaces he can find are on online. Mark states that due to his visual impairment, he struggles to be apart of online conversations. Mark isn't out to his friends or family, and has identified that he is experiencing extreme anxiety.

What advice would you give Mark?

Starting a conversation

Everyone can feel lonely at times, but long periods of loneliness and social isolation can have a negative impact. When engaging with LGBTIQ+ people with a disability, it is important to apply an intersectional wholistic approach, seeing all of the person acknowledging all aspects of their identities.

The first step is starting a conversation around connecting or reconnecting to community. Seek resources such as Switchboard. By taking access needs into consideration, you an ally to the LGBTIQ+ community and people with a disability experiencing loneliness and isolation.

“Community means to me, a safe spot, a place where you as a person can explore, grow and heal”

Seeking help

When experiencing isolation and loneliness, there is nothing wrong in seeking help, consider if the following has presented itself:

- **Physical symptoms** – aches and pains, headaches, illness or worsening of medical conditions
- **Mental health conditions** – increased risk of depression, anxiety, paranoia or panic attacks
- **Low energy** – tiredness or lack of motivation
- **Sleep problems** – difficulty sleeping, waking frequently or sleeping too much

- **Diet problems** – loss of appetite, sudden weight gain or loss
- **Substance use** – Increased consumption of alcohol, smoking, medications, drugs
- **Negative feelings** – feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or thoughts about suicide

These behaviours are a sign to consider reaching out and speaking to someone, particularly if they have been present for some weeks. Consider speaking to, a friend, teacher, councillor, community hotline, doctor or family member.

Alex has recently filled in a feedback form, evaluating her experiences from the last LGBTIQ+ event your organisation hosted. On her feedback form she states, “throughout the workshop I struggled to participate, that my walker didn’t give me the ability to fully engage in group activities, and the lack of breaks resulted in me disengaging and struggling to keep up with the content”. Alex also mentioned that she felt isolated, as people refused to engage in conversation with her, and felt too anxious to mention her concerns to the group.

What barriers may have caused Alex to feel isolated?

