Loneliness in one page

What it is

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the painful feeling that your relationships do not meet your need for connection. It is a feeling, not a diagnosis. More than 1 in 4 people in Australia are lonely, and you can feel it in a crowd or live alone without it.

- Loneliness is a feeling, not a diagnosis
- Being alone and feeling lonely are different things
- You can feel lonely with people all around you

The signs

What are the signs of loneliness?

Common signs of loneliness are feeling that nobody understands you or that you have no one to turn to. Many people pull away to avoid rejection, sleep badly and feel tired. If it lasts or weighs on you, talk to a GP.

- Feeling that no one understands you is a sign
- Lonely people often pull away to avoid rejection
- Big life changes make loneliness more likely

Where to start

Is there a service for loneliness?

Yes, FriendLine, a national line run by Friends for Good. A trained volunteer rings you back or chats with you online. To talk to a mental health worker, walk into a free Medicare Mental Health Centre.

Treatment

Does treating one help the other?

It can, because social anxiety and loneliness feed each other. Australian research found earlier social anxiety predicted later loneliness, so easing the fear can make connection easier. Therapy such as CBT works on the fear, and community activities build the connection. Many people need both, in a pace that feels manageable.

- Social anxiety can predict later loneliness
- CBT works on the fear of judgement
- Social prescribing builds connection

Medication

Therapy or medicine first?

Either can come first for social anxiety, and therapy is the usual starting point. Australia's psychiatry guideline lists therapy, medicine with advice on facing fears step by step, or both. For loneliness, the GP college backs social prescribing, which links you to community activities. A doctor decides about any medicine with you.

- CBT, medicine or both can start
- Medicine comes with advice to face fears
- Loneliness is met with connection

What it costs

What does Medicare cover?

Medicare helps with up to 10 individual and 10 group therapy sessions a year under Better Access, once your GP writes a mental health treatment plan. That help is for a diagnosed mental health disorder, such as social anxiety disorder. You pay any gap above the Medicare amount. Community activities through social prescribing sit outside these sessions.

- Up to 10 individual sessions a year
- Up to 10 group therapy sessions a year

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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