

**OTR**

**'TIS THE SEASON  
TO BE...LONELY?**

**December 2018**

# ***WELCOME TO THE OTR GUIDE TO LONELINESS!***

The holiday season can be tough. There, we said it. Booklet over!

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No, but for real, what is often sold to us as the most wholesome, family focussed and loving time of year can actually be really difficult.

Whether it be because our family doesn't look like the ones we see in adverts and can be tough to spend time with, or because we don't feel like we fit in with them, or simply because we don't have a way of spending time with anyone over the holiday season - a common theme emerges - that of loneliness.

Culturally, loneliness is something that is a bit complex - we're expected to be independent yet always have people around us, we're told we're more connected than ever because of social media yet we can feel exhausted by it and it can even make us feel more detached... it's a messy idea at the best of times.

Yet the underlying idea is that loneliness=bad, or 'if you're a good human you won't feel alone'.

We want to challenge that idea.



# LONELY OR... ALONE?

**The first thing we wanna do is unpack what loneliness actually means, and to separate it from just being alone... Have a read at what we think!**

## BEING ALONE...

- **Is a state of being. It's something you 'are'.**
- **Isn't a problem! And can be important for mental health and wellbeing. Get some 'You' time!**
- **Can make you feel recharged and ready for the world!**
- **Can help you to put yourself first - taking care of yourself and focussing on what you need to do!**

## LONELINESS...

- **Is an emotional response. You can feel lonely and be surrounded by people!**
- **Is totally normal! Everyone feels lonely sometimes. It helps us to know we need others.**
- **Too much loneliness can start to wear you down, and can affect your wellbeing.**
- **Can make us feel like something is wrong with us, and can stop us from being kind to ourselves.**

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**DISCLAIMER: We are not telling you that being alone is the best thing for you all the time - nor that feeling lonely means there is something wrong with you!**

**The goal here is to try and separate the two ideas - and bigging up the idea that being alone can be good for us in moderation. Ultimately, YOU will know what works (and doesn't) for you!**

# ***EXPECTATIONS AND LONELINESS***

As we mentioned in the first page, one of the main reasons we are talking about loneliness for this month is due to some of the societal and cultural pressures that come with the winter seasons. From religious festivals to cultural traditions - there is often a similar theme of 'coming together'. Whether that be in families, or as friends or communities - there is a common theme in the media and the world around us of how an 'ideal' instagram-worthy festive fun should be guaranteed.

However, shock-horror, the reality is not what we can see in adverts, or even how other people we know present it on things like social media. The expectations rarely actually equal reality - as life, families and social situations are naturally pretty complex.

With that in mind - we thought it important to actually look at some of the expectations we may have in the backs of our minds - and check them out with reality!

(Whilst we're thinking of the winter/festive seasons, this activity can be applied to any form of social event - family get togethers, birthdays, festivals or parties! Adapt as you feel useful!)

**1. How is the 'festive season' (for example, christmas etc) stereotypically displayed in the media (tv, online, magazines, adverts)?**

**2. How have these stereotypes affected your expectations? Are you excited? Feeling good - or bad? Both?**

**3. Do these expectations have an impact on how you think and feel during the festive season? Is it a positive or negative impact?**

# HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT LONELINESS?

As a part of the cultural and social stuff around loneliness - there is a pretty big stigma surrounding talking about it, or ever admitting that you feel it. This stigma results in a feeling of shame and embarrassment about expressing this totally normal and human feeling. So, how do we break this stigma?

1) When you think of a 'lonely person', what do you think of?

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2) What do you think this says about the messages around loneliness in our culture?

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## So how do we directly tackle this problem?

The first step to tackling the problem of how we talk about loneliness is... well, to change the way we talk about it!

Taking what you've thought about in the last two questions, what could you do to challenge the stereotypes? Jot down some ideas below...

- E.G. "Try to feel more comfortable with the idea that I get lonely"
- E.G. "Encourage people I know if/when they mention it. Let them know it's normal..."

**(Jot down your ideas below!)**

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# ***INDEPENDENCE, DEPENDENCE AND INTERDEPENDENCE***

Our culture really encourages independence, to the point that it says if you aren't independent then you are dependent - which is seen as 'weak' or 'immature'. Can this actually make us more lonely?

We think so. The problem with over-valuing independence is that it can stop us from recognising and valuing each other - and that we may need support from/can give support to others and that that's totally normal and healthy. Being able to connect with others whilst valuing yourself and your needs is called 'Interdependence', and we think is the healthiest way of relating to people around us. Have a look at what this looks like in practice!

## ***Independence***

***Is unable to depend on other people.***

***"I must do everything alone", not allowing support if/when needed.***

***Values own needs far more than the needs of others.***

***Must keep self protected and separate***

***"Me Me Me..."***

## ***Interdependence***

***Is able to depend on self and others.***

***"I can reach out to those around me for support, or do it alone if I must".***

***Values the self and those close to us in a balance.***

***Recognises the value of vulnerability, can allow emotional/personal connection to be important***

***"We We We..."***

## ***Dependence***

***Is unable to depend on self.***

***"I can't do anything alone. You must do this for me.***

***Values needs of others far more than own needs.***

***Must keep others close at all time. Can't separate***

***"You You You..."***

This page isn't about telling you that you should only be Interdependent 100% of the time... sometimes independence is essential, and sometimes dependence is unavoidable...Whilst Interdependence may be the way to go, it's important to know you will move through the three depending on life, and that's alright!

# MAKING FRIENDS WITH BEING ALONE

So, now we've looked at a load of stuff around loneliness, being alone and the cultural expectations of us to be both independent yet also always be with people - let's finish off with by thinking about how we can practice being alone, and how we can actually 'make friends with' the idea of it.

## **1) WHAT BENEFITS COULD YOU SEE BY PRACTICING BEING ALONE?**

E.G. - If you know who you are and know that you are relating to others because you want to, rather than because of pressure and expectations from yourself/others, then you are more free.

- This can make better relationships, as they are more genuine and you are more free within them to be yourself.

**(Try to think of three other benefits below!)**

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## **2) HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE IT?**

E.G. - Taking yourself for a walk

- Picking up some creative materials or a musical instrument.

- Make a fire and gaze into the flames

**(Try to think of three other ways you can practice it!)**

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**Try to find 5 mins a day to be alone... see how you feel!**



**This booklet was made by OTR Bristol,  
a mental health social movement by and  
for young people aged 11-25 in Bristol  
and South Glos.**

**For more information on what we do,  
come and see us at one of our Hubs:  
[otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/hubs](http://otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/hubs).**

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