



National Youth
Partnership

Youth Homelessness: Exploring feelings of isolation and loneliness

Resource pack




HM Government




Foundation



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Introduction

This resource pack has been designed for those workers who either have little or no experience of working with young people that are experiencing feelings of loneliness or isolation, or those professionals who may be at the early stages of working with young people on these kinds of issues. Funded by the Co-operative Foundation, the resource pack has been developed by youth workers who have experience of delivering projects specifically focused on tackling youth loneliness and isolation and young people who have experienced homelessness to give insight on how these feelings manifest, linked to their situations.

Youth loneliness and isolation is a complex subject. This resource pack does not provide a set of answers; it instead provides an avenue to begin to explore, debate and discuss some of the core themes associated with youth homelessness and feelings, thoughts and experiences of being, or becoming, lonely or isolated.

Through research in recent years, we are beginning to get an insight into the scale of youth loneliness and isolation, and the impact being lonely or isolated can have on individuals. Young people feel loneliness more intensely and more frequently than any other age group. Two-fifths (40 per cent) of people aged 16-24 say they feel lonely often or very often." (*BBC Loneliness Experiment, 2018*).

Loneliness and isolation can be difficult and sensitive subjects; subjects that can feel overwhelming at times, but we can help young people begin to explore the issues, to start taking positive steps in their own lives, and even build the confidence and motivation to help others.

Definitions of isolation and loneliness

Loneliness and isolation is an increasing issue for young people. There are a range of definitions for loneliness and isolation, but the following are ones we find helpful to use.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the difference between desired and actual social relations (*Perlman & Peplau, 1981*) - either in quantity or quality of relationships (or both).

What is social isolation?

A state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships (*Nicholson, 2009, p. 1346*).



Why and how the resource pack was developed

We have been working for the last 4 years specifically around isolation and loneliness, we know it's a difficult and sensitive subject but we have found that the majority of young people will start talking about it when given the right environments and safe and supportive space to do so.

Sometimes it's hard to have these discussions especially face to face but by using certain resources / tools it can create a gateway to initiating these conversations.

81% of young people fear the reactions of others when talking about their own feelings of loneliness. Young people are four times as likely to feel comfortable reaching out to a friend who seems lonely, then admitting they often feel lonely themselves.

We have also worked closely with young people who have had experience of or are currently homeless and have seen and heard about how these feelings manifest within these complex circumstances. Due to the challenges, assumptions and difficulties they are up against the glaring issue of isolation and loneliness is right there in front of us but often gets hidden because we are dealing with the more obvious need for food, shelter and warmth.

This resource has been informed and shaped by a wide range of young people who have had experience of this.

They have worked with a local writer, actors and film maker to produce a short film to express their views linked to 4 distinct questions we asked them.

The following section contains the link to the film, developed with young people, that we have used to help start the conversation. You may want to use this yourself or develop your own. If you do develop your own resources, we would love to add them to the Tackling Youth Loneliness website, so please contact steve@youthfocusne.org.uk.

The young people were asked the following 4 questions.

The film portrays their responses.

Q1. What causes feelings of isolation and loneliness for young people experiencing homelessness?

Why we asked this question :-

We wanted real views from young people who have been homeless. Many assumptions can be made by others, but hearing directly from those who have been through it can bring to light the realities of their situation. This subject matter in comparison to other key areas linked to homelessness (E.g. shelter/ housing; providing clothes and food) can sometimes be overlooked but plays a crucial part in homeless young people's lives and their experiences.

Q2. What has helped you/others in these situations to overcome those feelings of isolation and loneliness or what do you feel could have helped to prevent these feelings?

Why we asked this question :-

Hearing from those who have been in this situation before can give insight and learning to those who may be faced with similar circumstances and also to those supporting them. It allows for people to explore different viewpoints, situations, what they feel themselves would be needed and also how they could support others.

Q3. If you could give advice to a young person facing homelessness on how to help overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness what would it be?

Why we asked this question :-

It can help to show that there are ways to overcome these feelings and things individuals can do themselves instead of solely relying on others. It can also give hope that they do have some control of their situation and that things can improve. It allows for people to explore personal needs and expectations of others.

Q4. If you could give advice to workers supporting young people (who are about to become /or are homeless) on how to prevent the young people feeling isolated or lonely what would it be?

Why we asked this question :-

Having information about the causes of isolation and loneliness for young people facing homelessness and what they feel they need in terms of support can help people / organisations / services to put preventative measures in place instead of responding as a reaction to a situation. It also allows for workers to explore gaps in their knowledge or skills set to deal with certain situations and be able to put measures in place to bridge these gaps.

This in itself can support the process of reducing the causes of isolation and loneliness as they are being recognised and dealt with at an earlier stage or even before they begin.

Using the film within sessions with young people

Initiating conversations around homelessness, isolation and loneliness can be difficult. You can use this short film to start exploring these subject matters.

Film Link :- [Breaking the Silence](#)



This film was made to be used within workshops with young people and can be used to start a discussion.

The film is 13 minutes long with a number of opportunities to pause the film and have more in-depth conversations around the subject matter.

It may be an idea to play the film through once with the group, reflect on what they thought of the film, how did it make them feel, what is going on, what did they notice? Then you may like to play the film again but stopping it at certain points to explore a bit further. This gives opportunity to review any new feelings, thoughts and perceptions coming through. This will open up different avenues to discuss for example different peoples' perspectives, where have these ideas or views come from and how these can be of influence to certain situations.

E.g. Showing the scene of the girl sat alone discussing her feelings of not being with her family. What are peoples' thoughts about that scene, what could have happened, what led to this?



Focusing discussions around the 4 questions we asked:-

Q1. Causes of isolation and loneliness

- You may want to explore what isolation and loneliness means and look at definitions for these terms.
- You could explore what loneliness and isolation looks like and feels like to them.

Q2. What helps?

- It is useful to explore with your group the things that they would find helpful if they found themselves in the position of being homeless and lonely.
- You could ask them how they usually react to someone who is homeless and explore the reasons why? This again could be unpicked further to explore how that may make the homeless person feel? How do their actions make them feel and why?
- Holding discussions around what they think they could do to help would develop a more positive mind-set as a first step to taking practical actions.

E.g. Within the film it talks about things that have helped young people who have been homeless – do they think these things would help them if faced with a similar situation, do they have ideas of their own?

Q3. Helping themselves

- You may want to explore with your group what they feel they would do / how they would react if faced with this situation.
- This could lead onto further discussions around coping mechanisms, how they could access support and what kind of support they would need.

E.g. You could use certain scenes within the film that show progression and positivity to get the young people to reflect on the strengths and qualities they already have, which they may have overlooked. They might not realise that they can get through certain situations or that they are not alone even if they feel that way.

Q4. How workers can help

- You could have discussions about services / organisations that you have in the local area that may be helpful.
- You may want to ask what they would expect from services / people working with young people who are faced with homelessness?

E.g. This film is based on reflections of young people who have experienced homelessness and feel that they are just seen as a number rather than as an individual. You could explore how young people would want to be treated if they were in a similar situation.

Some thoughts around your discussions :-

Within your session you could get the young people to think about if they were producing their own film on the subject matter what would it be like? How would they have filmed it, what would they have included in it?

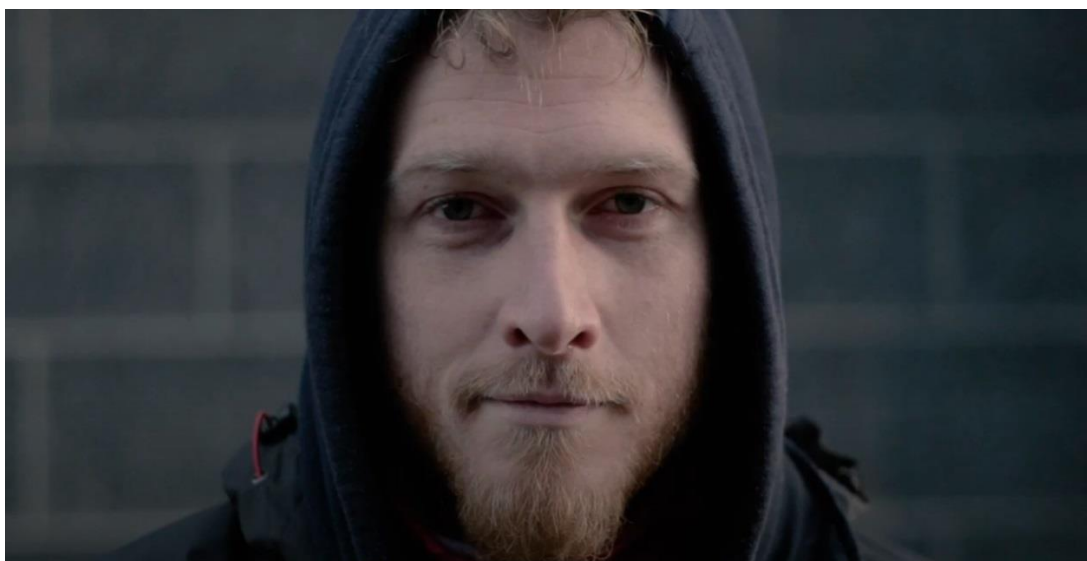
You may like to explore the notion of them taking on the role - become the actor / director for the film. Putting themselves in other peoples' shoes, how does this make them feel and does it make them think in a different way or change their opinions or views?

You could also look at other means to share their thoughts, ideas, feelings around homelessness, isolation and loneliness too. For example, art work using different materials, written pieces, song writing, music, role play etc.

You may want to explore how individuals would like to do this within your group, this allows for them to feel comfortable with exploring the subject matter in a manner that is fitting for them.

If individuals are happy to it may be an idea for them to present and talk through their ideas or things they may have produced within the session.

“It’s difficult to ask for help, but this is it we’re doing it”



Data and Statistics

- 65% of young people believe loneliness is a problem for people of their age.
- 81% cite fear of people's reactions as a barrier to speaking about loneliness.
- 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.
- Less than one in five feel youth loneliness is taken seriously as a social issue.
- Less than one in ten think young people feel confident talking about loneliness.





(Co-op Foundation, 2018, All or emotions are important – Breaking the silence about youth loneliness report, ICM survey of 2000 young people across the UK)

- Loneliness can be as harmful for health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

(Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. PLoS Med 2010;7)

- Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to a 30% increase in the risk of having a stroke or coronary artery disease, the two major causes of death and illness in wealthy societies. *(British Medical Journal, 2016)*

Other helpful resources

-  A range of useful resources can be found on the **Tackling Youth Loneliness** [website](#)
-  Shelter :- the housing and homelessness charity [website](#)
-  DePaul charity [website](#)
-  Centre Point [website](#)

You can also seek out local support services in your area you can do this by contacting your Local Authorities or Council for Voluntary Services.