



Loneliness

Moving to a new place usually brings changes in lifestyle, work patterns, social networks and family life. The accumulated effect can be disorientating and make you feel uncertain of what to do or how to be with others. Social insecurity can then creep in, even if you normally feel quite socially adept. Or it may feel like a repeat of other times when you arrived somewhere and found it hard to make connections.

Loneliness when moving to a new place or starting a new job can be common for lots of different reasons including:

- being away from friends and family, perhaps for the first time
- having to 'start from scratch' and make new friends
- you may have been lonely before you came to Cambridge and hoped that things would be different here
- you may be missing old friends and finding it hard to replace them – or you may feel reluctant to engage with new people
- you may find that your working environment is very different or that you are not sure how to interact with your colleagues
- you may be preoccupied with issues that make it hard to be as sociable as you would like
- you may have a long-distance relationship or feel torn between family life here and elsewhere
- you may be anxious about work and feel in conflict about spending time on social activities
- you may feel like you don't belong in Cambridge.

Loneliness can lead to you feeling socially inadequate, unlikeable, uncomfortable in the company of others or angry and critical of other people. It can all build up. Feeling burdened by loneliness can feel draining and undermine your self-esteem. All of this can make it harder still to take part in social activity or to look after yourself by doing the things you normally enjoy or that help you feel better. It can also feel hard to say no to things you wouldn't normally do.

What you can do

Most of us experience feelings of loneliness at times. It can feel that you are the only one in that situation, but for all you know, others might be putting on a brave face and be experiencing similar feelings to the ones you struggle with. The pain you feel is a normal reaction because social contact is such a basic human need.

Here are some things that might help:

- Look after yourself. Some of us take longer to settle in socially to a new environment. If your initial efforts do not bear fruit, acknowledge the efforts you are making.
- Try to say hello, or even just smile, at people you pass in your accommodation or workplace. That can make it easier to later strike up a conversation.
- It can feel unfair if you are having to make all the running in organising to do something with someone. But it may be the only way to initiate having more fulfilling social relationships. It can be aggravating and dispiriting if people don't reply to your texts, emails or other contacts. Remember that most of the time it won't be to do with you personally.

- You can try activities that you enjoy, as well as new ones, both for the experience and to widen the opportunities for social contact. You don't have to stick with an activity if you find you don't like it, but do try to give it some time - initial experiences don't always meet our expectations but can change over time. Pace yourself - you don't have to try everything at once; doing so might leave you feeling overstretched.
- If there isn't a group or society for your passion, why not start one? It may seem like a bold step, but it might be easier than you think, and having a project can also reduce your loneliness. You can search for social groups in your area or create a new group at www.meetup.com.
- Going online to connect with others safely can feel like a less challenging way to reduce your loneliness, but balancing it with fact-to-face experiences is likely to be even more rewarding.
- Carry on doing the things you really enjoy – take yourself to the movies or to an event, even if there is no one to go with.
- Doing things for other people can make us feel good about ourselves and can reduce loneliness, as well as helping to build relationships.
- Some of us are more at ease in groups and others in one-to-one situations. Notice your own preference and 'style' and play to your own strengths.

Where to seek more help

If you continue to feel lonely, you can access individual counselling at the University Counselling Service to talk more about your experiences and options that might help.

You can find more information on the University Staff Counselling Service website: <https://staff.counselling.cam.ac.uk>

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