

Connecting Communities

‘Using the MECC Approach to help tackle Social Isolation and Loneliness’

Supported by:



Public Health
England



THE JO COX
FOUNDATION

Objectives

- ▶ To understand the difference between loneliness and social isolation
- ▶ To understand the health impact of social isolation and loneliness
- ▶ To understand how and why people can experience social isolation and loneliness at different points in their life
- ▶ To understand how we can use the MECC approach to combat loneliness one conversation at a time
- ▶ To learn more about the services and organisations that are available nationally and locally

‘We should also do more to equip people with information about the potential triggers for loneliness and ensure they know where to go for support.’ - Source: Jo Cox Commission – Call to Action

Loneliness is not the same as social isolation

- ▶ People can be isolated (alone) yet not feel lonely
- ▶ People can be surrounded by other people, yet still feel lonely
 - ▶ **Loneliness** has been described as an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship, marked by a discrepancy between the contact people have and what they desire*
 - ▶ **Social isolation** is an objective measure of the number of contacts that people have. It is about the quantity and not quality of relationships

Example: Albert is 73, he lives in Sheltered flat on his own but has a carer who visits every day to see how he is and prepare a meal for him. Albert has children and grandchild who don't live locally but do send him regular text messages and social media posts. Could Albert feel lonely?

The loneliness project



The health impacts of social isolation and loneliness

- ▶ The Campaign to End Loneliness points to research which shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day*

Why do you think this might be?



The health impacts of social isolation and loneliness

▶ Loneliness and physical health

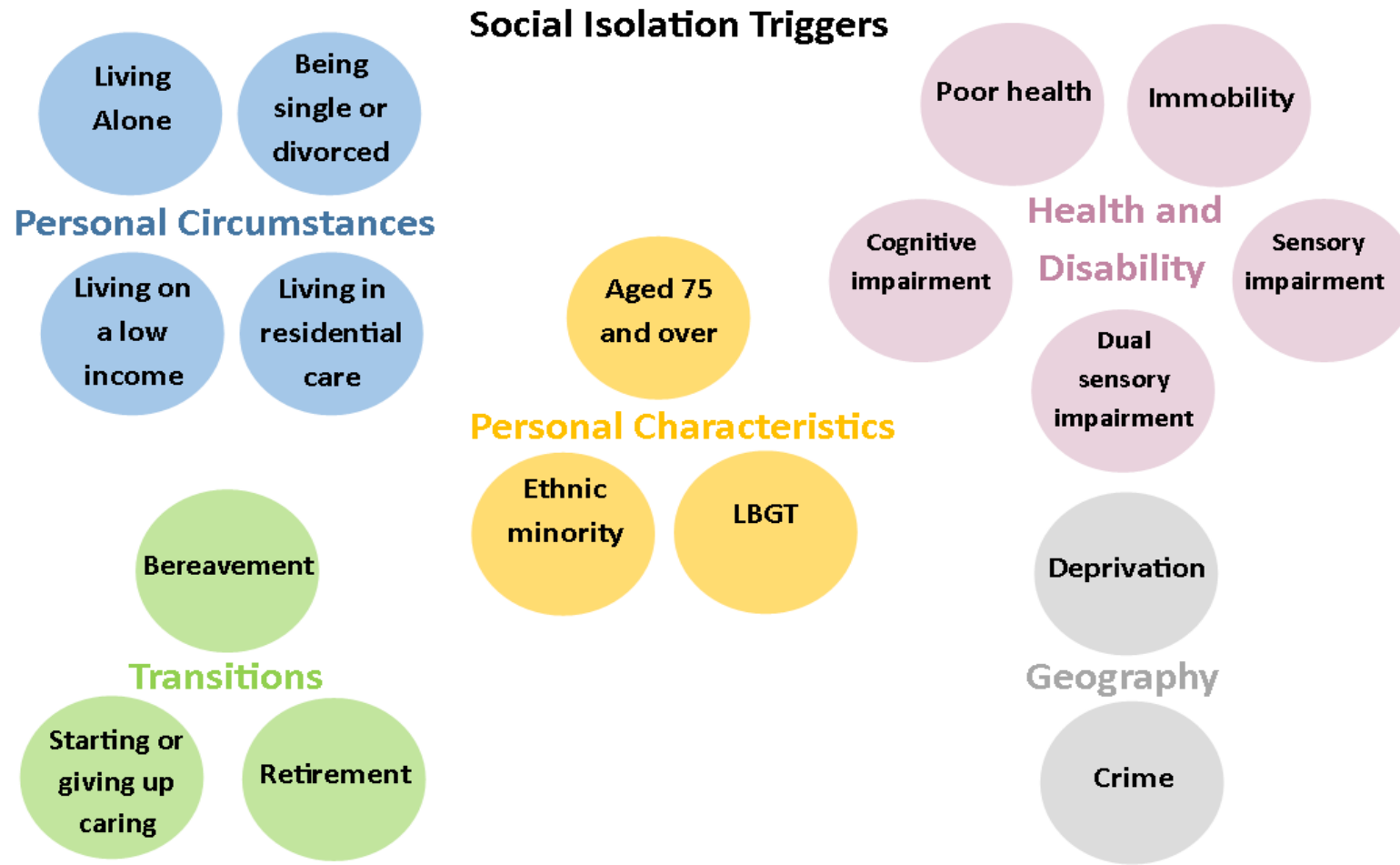
- ▶ Loneliness increases the likelihood of mortality by 26% (Holt-Lunstad, 2015)
- ▶ The effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity, and has a similar influence as cigarette smoking (Holt-Lunstad, 2010)
- ▶ Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke (Valtorta et al, 2016)
- ▶ Loneliness increases the risk of high blood pressure (Hawkley et al, 2010)
- ▶ Lonely individuals are also at higher risk of the onset of disability (Lund et al, 2010)

▶ Loneliness and mental health

- ▶ Loneliness puts individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline (James et al, 2011)
- ▶ One study concludes lonely people have a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia (Holwerda et al, 2012)
- ▶ Lonely individuals are more prone to depression (Cacioppo et al, 2006) (Green et al, 1992)
- ▶ Loneliness and low social interaction are predictive of suicide in older age (O'Connell et al, 2004)

'Young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate' –Jo Cox

How and why people can experience social isolation and loneliness at different points in their life



Using the MECC Approach to combat loneliness one conversation at a time

- ▶ Understand that people who are lonely don't choose to be lonely
- ▶ Understand that people who are lonely are likely to find it difficult to open up about being lonely
- ▶ **....But you can help!**
- ▶ Together we can all help to create connections with people and their communities by adopting the Making Every Contact Count approach
- ▶ You can help people take the first steps by reconnecting them to the support they need for a lifetime of connection and improved health outcomes

Using the MECC Approach to combat loneliness one conversation at a time

▶ ASK

- ▶ How often would you say you take part in hobbies or social activities?
- ▶ Do you have any particular hobbies or outside interests that you enjoy doing?
- ▶ Are you happy with the way you spend your time?
- ▶ Do you have a network of friendships and relationships?
- ▶ Do you have a close friend or family member that you could turn to for support if you needed it?
 - ▶ Facilitate a conversation about loneliness, using the skills and qualities of empathy, openness, warmth and respect, and help people to understand their own circumstances and plan their own solutions.
 - ▶ Allow the person to tell their story, to review their loneliness and what is happening now

Using the MECC Approach to combat loneliness one conversation at a time

▶ ASSIST

- ▶ What would you like to be doing differently, and how would that make you feel?
- ▶ Is there anything you would like to change about the way you spend your time?
- ▶ Can I give you some information to help support the opportunities we discussed?
- ▶ Would these things make a difference to you?
 - ▶ The goals should be the individual's
 - ▶ Help the person identify the incentives in tackling their loneliness: what benefits will accrue for the person? Are there factors that make change necessary?

Using the MECC Approach to combat loneliness one conversation at a time

▶ ACT

- ▶ Most people need some kind of social contact but everyone has different social needs.
- ▶ The person may be someone who is content with a few close friends, or they may need a large group of varied acquaintances to feel satisfied.
- ▶ State that the simplest way to ease feelings of loneliness can be to try to meet more, or different, people.
- ▶ Can they think of anything they are interested in, a class or a group they have heard of, that could help connect them with new people?
- ▶ There are many voluntary and charitable groups that offer befriending, social dining, hobby craft and special interest connections.
- ▶ See MECC Link for further information



The types of services and organisations available nationally

- ▶ [The Silver Line](#) is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. **Call 0800 470 8090.**
 - ▶ The Silver Line can also put the person in contact with community activities in their local area
- ▶ [NHS Choices](#) has a range of advice on Loneliness including volunteering, continuing education and how to engage with social media and computers.
- ▶ [Get Connected](#) is a free confidential helpline for young people, where people can seek help with emotional and mental health issues often linked to loneliness
- ▶ The [Great Get Together](#) building kinder communities and ensuring everyone feels a sense of belonging wherever they live.

The types of services and organisations available locally



Digital Inclusion



Men in Sheds



Social dining



Befriending



Social activities

You can make a difference!





Any
Questions

