

TOGETHER
INSTEAD OF LONELY



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ND *EINZIGARTIG.
SO WIE DU.*

Your local guidebook on loneliness

Dear citizens,

Loneliness is a feeling that can be a heavy burden on the soul. Loneliness feels different for everyone, and everyone can be affected. Its effects on health can be severe: cardiovascular diseases, weakening of the immune system or depression.

We have prepared this booklet in order to support you. On the following pages, you will not only find valuable information, but also numerous contact persons who will listen to what you have to say and who are there to help.

Our main goal is to make you feel well in your homeland and to reassure you that you are not alone. Being together and interpersonal relationships are the decisive factor in overcoming the feeling of loneliness. We would like to encourage you to get in touch with the contact persons listed in this booklet, so you can find support and other people you can join and leave loneliness behind.

TOGETHER INSTEAD OF LONELY – that is our motto. We are at your side and we want you to feel welcome in our community. Please do not hesitate to accept the help that is offered to you.



Dr. Oliver Bär Head of the district authority of Hof



Eva Döhla
Head mayor of the municipality of Hof



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Dear citizens,

We at the Gesundheitsregion Plus Hofer Land (Health Region Plus in the Hof region) have made the issue of loneliness a part of our preventive work. Loneliness is also a subject of priority for the Bavarian state ministry for health and care. Our compact guidebook provides you with basic information and an overview of support resources available to people in the Hof region, who are directly or indirectly affected by loneliness.

We would like to thank our local experts, Alexandra Pape (Diakonie Hochfranken Erwachsenenhilfe gGmbH, coordination office for mental health of the elderly – gerontopsychiatric specialist coordination for Upper Franconia), Tanja Rakowitz (Rummelsberger Diakonie – specialist unit for family caregivers), Andreas Buheitel (educational counselling/outpatient clinic for youth support at the psychological counselling office of Diakonie Hochfranken), Holger Fiedler (Catholic parish Bernhard Lichtenberg) and Anne Browa (VHS Hofer Land e.V.), who provided their expertise for the creation of this guidebook. The conclusions of their interviews are the basis for this guidebook and contribute to a better understanding of the issue of loneliness.

Even small gestures of solidarity can make a big difference. A friendly smile, an uplifting word or a chat with a neighbour – all can help to make loneliness less of a burden. Let's work together to fight isolation.

Best wishes, and enjoy reading,
Your team at Gesundheitsregion Plus Hofer Land

This booklet is also available in German. A digital version and more information about our projects can be found at:
www.gesundheitsregion.plus



Important Key information in a nutshell:

- Loneliness is not a disease, but rather a subjective, negative feeling you have not chosen by yourself. It is different from choosing to be alone.
- This feeling can develop when the relationships we wish for do not align with our actual relationships.
- There may be different reasons for feeling lonely, for example having lost somebody close to you, a feeling of not belonging to your social environment or a lack of friendships.
- The feeling of loneliness can persist for a short or a long time period. If loneliness persists for a longer time period, there is a higher risk for health issues.
- The Hof region provides a wide range of support resources that can help anyone affected find their way out of loneliness.

Source: "Wenn Einsamkeit krank macht - Bericht zu den gesundheitlichen Folgen von Einsamkeit in Bayern", Bavarian state ministry for health and care, (2023), Munich



Definition

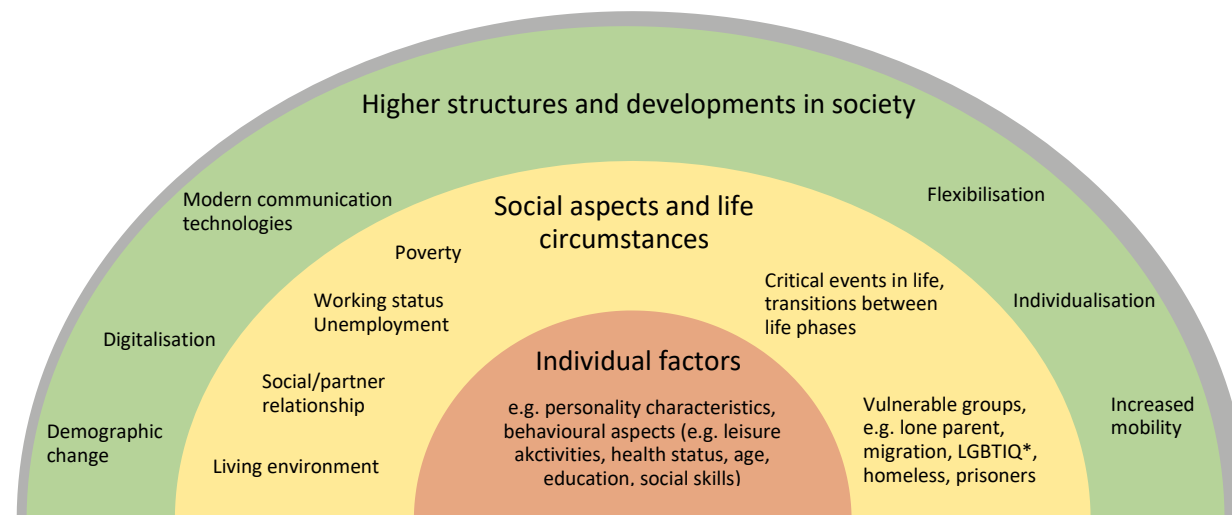
What is loneliness?

We have all seen situations in which we felt alone – sometimes it might have been for a brief moment only, sometimes for a longer period of time. Loneliness, however, is more than the absence of company. It is a subjective and negative feeling of isolation, accompanied by negative emotions.

There are various reasons for people feeling lonely. Some examples are changing your place of residence, changes in your work life or retirement. The travelling distance between you and your family and friends, a shrinking social network, financial problems or language barriers may also play a substantial role. Additionally, other factors like old age, unemployment or a low income lead to an increased risk for loneliness.

Source: "Wenn Einsamkeit krank macht - Bericht zu den gesundheitlichen Folgen von Einsamkeit in Bayern", Bavarian state ministry for health and care, (2023), Munich

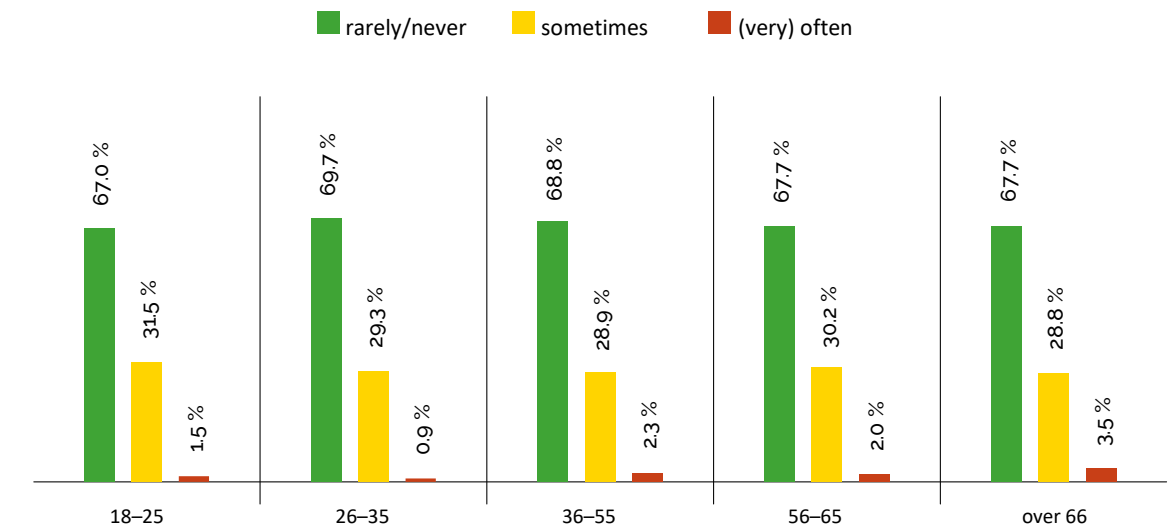
Potential influencing factors of loneliness:



Data source: Own illustration LGL, according to Dahlgren/Whitehead

LGBTIQ means: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, inter* and queer*

Rate of loneliness among adults in Bavaria and Germany, by age group, 2017



Everyone can be affected by loneliness, irrespective of age and gender. It is particularly common when there is a transition into a new phase of life. It is hard to tell the exact frequency of loneliness in Germany, as it is a subjective feeling for which there are no standardised measuring methods. Experts assume that about 2.3 % of the Bavarian population are (very) often affected by very strong feelings of loneliness. Additionally, about 30 % of the population stated that they are sometimes suffering from very strong feelings of loneliness. The results have also shown that women are slightly more affected than men, that people living alone and singles are more often suffering from loneliness, and that there is a particularly high rate of loneliness among the unemployed and the poor

Source: "Gesundheitliche Folgen von Einsamkeit. Informationen zum Präventionsthema 2023 des Bayerischen Staatsministerium für Gesundheit und Pflege", (2023), Munich

Who is affected?

Is the rate of loneliness generally increasing? And who is affected in particular?

These are the questions we asked our experts in the Hof region in order to dive deeper into the subject. Does loneliness gain ground in today's society, and if so, which population groups are particularly affected?

Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken is convinced that problematic feelings of loneliness have increased since the start of the corona pandemic. Some children and adolescents are struggling to reconnect with previous acquaintances and friends. In his opinion, young people are particularly affected when living in poverty or having little support in their environment when it comes to keeping in touch with others. Furthermore, children suffering from chronic diseases or disability are struggling to maintain contact. He also highlights difficult events in life that can lead to withdrawal, for example parents breaking up or the loss of a beloved person. He also mentions that lone parents might feel lonely, as they mostly have the sole responsibility for their children and as their daily life is made up of many duties and tasks.

Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. remarks that loneliness is not bound to certain age groups. And it is difficult to measure as these people rarely seek help proactively. When it comes to those particularly affected, she thinks that special circumstances in life are driving a feeling of loneliness: death of the partner, children moving out, diseases.



When asked about the increase in loneliness, Alexandra Pape (Diakonie Hochfranken) refers to big differences in available data. Before the corona pandemic, an estimated 5 to 10 % of all adults in Germany were very often suffering from loneliness. Differences between age groups were identified: "In a study conducted in 2013 it was found that the perceived average intensity of loneliness is on a particular strong rise in old age (from about age 80) and is lowest at the age of 65 to 75 years. Furthermore, adults in their 30s and 50s were more affected. Looking at the first studies, Alexandra Pape also sees an increase in loneliness in all age groups due to the corona pandemic, but especially among adolescents and young adults, the parents of little children and singles.

The Pastor Mr. Fiedler adds some more target groups he considers as being threatened by loneliness: People whose families live far away, whose partners or friends have already passed away or whose contact persons have broken away. He adds: "There surely are very challenging people who are not easy to live together with and who are being avoided. I think that especially this form of loneliness has become more common."



Being alone

What is the difference between loneliness and being alone?

Loneliness or being alone – what is the exact difference? Two words that are often mixed up. But do they always have a negative meaning or can there also be positive aspects? We asked our experts in the Hof region to look at the differences between these conditions from various perspectives.

Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken comments: “Being alone can be regarded as comfortable or as a punishment, depending on your inner mind-set. On the other hand, loneliness is always an uncomfortable, depressing feeling. Being alone is an objective physical state and means that there are no other people around. However, people may also feel lonely when – objectively seen – they have many social contacts, which are lacking emotional depth and understanding though. Only when we feel that we have no control over the quality and frequency of social contacts, loneliness develops.”

Pastor Fiedler explains that both words, as he understands them, can at first be actually positive. “You need times in your life in which you are seeking loneliness to be able to contemplate or pray. Everyone has times in which they want to be alone and where another person is disturbing, for example when you want to write something or complete a task in peace. Being alone and loneliness, if self-chosen, may be successful ways of life.”



Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. points out that it makes big difference whether somebody voluntarily chooses to be alone or not: “Being alone can be self-chosen and the loneliness arising from it then has a rather positive effect. This situation is temporary and can serve the hygiene of your soul. Loneliness that is not self-chosen can become problematic if the person does not know how to connect with others. This feeling can also develop within a group. A good example for this is the outsider in a school class. Some even have a feeling of not belonging at family celebrations – that means feeling lonely in the midst of familiar people.”

Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken gives examples underlining the important difference between self-chosen solitude and involuntary solitude. “Children and adolescents have the need to be alone in order to deal with themselves and to pursue their interests, for example when playing, listening to music etc. At the same time, they wish to do something together with other children and adolescents in order to share interests, fun, joy, but also sadness. If young people cannot sufficiently satisfy their need for company or if interpersonal contacts are not perceived as fulfilling, then there is a risk of feeling lonely, which means being permanently alone without wanting it.”

Characteristics of being alone and loneliness

Being alone

- Might be self-chosen
- Might be perceived as inspiring by some people
- Refers to the physical absence of other people

Loneliness

- Involuntary
- Subjective feelings and experiences of an individual
- Is a negative and emotional feeling of isolation
- Independent from being in company or alone

Source: Prof. Dr. Maike Luhmann, Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik e.V., Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit, (2022), „Definition und Formen der Einsamkeit“, Berlin

How do I know that I am lonely?

Alexandra Pape (Diakonie Hochfranken) underlines that loneliness can neither be diagnosed nor can it be exactly measured. “However, the essential characteristic of loneliness is the lack of emotional attachment to other people, and it being perceived individually and subjectively. Most people know the feeling of loneliness: especially adolescents, young adults and the elderly are more often suffering from prolonged phases of loneliness. One reason for this are the challenges brought by these phases in life.” She lists some risk factors that may contribute to chronic loneliness: “Being introvert and emotionally unstable, unemployment, poverty, immigration background, being single, limitations due to health conditions, social isolation and poor social relationships. Alexandra Pape mentions the following possible signs of chronic loneliness: “Lack of emotional attachment to other people, lack of self-confidence, feeling worthless, uneasiness in social situations, social withdrawal, neglecting your appearance or self-care, unhealthy diet, changes in the routine, for example changes in sleeping habits.”

Reflection

This is how Pastor Fiedler identifies loneliness: “Loneliness can be identified by longing for conversations which I cannot have, by having nobody who visits, calls or contacts me, by simply being forgotten by others and feeling left alone.”

According to Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V., the signs of loneliness are characterised by a constant feeling of sadness even when in company, along with the sentiment of “not belonging”. This emotional experience often leads to people having little or no motivation for participating in social events.



Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken uses the example of children and adolescents in identifying loneliness: “Loneliness is accompanied by feelings of sadness and possibly anger, and hides behind several behavioural problems. Children and adolescents draw back, spend an unusual high amount of time on their own and feel misunderstood by their caregivers. They talk less to their parents, seem introverted, listless and run out of energy. Their thinking is often characterised by negative thoughts and ideas.”

Regularly reflect upon your own situation. If you notice signs of an emotional burden due to loneliness, talk to somebody you trust or make early usage of the support offered by the Hof region.

When will loneliness turn into a problem?



When is loneliness turning into a challenge that negatively affects our wellbeing and quality of life? For Pastor Fiedler, loneliness becomes a problem “when it is involuntary and lasts for a long time. Somebody who is alone for a long time and has nobody to share joy and sadness with, will become lonely over time.”

Anne Browa (VHS Hofer Land e.V.) describes problematic loneliness as a permanent state in which you have no possibility to talk about it. Furthermore, you often do not feel motivated to approach other people, and that can eventually lead to health issues.

For Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken, feelings of loneliness are functional at first, an alarm signal of the body, like hunger and thirst. “As long as loneliness lasts for a short period of time only, it will not turn into a problem. However, when it starts manifesting, when people are withdrawing and lose their self-confidence and trust in others, as well as their ability to come into contact with others, the problem begins. We finally talk about chronic loneliness when feelings of loneliness last for several months and years and when a vicious circle of negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours limiting us in our daily life starts to develop. This chronic form of loneliness can finally result in severe health issues.”

Andreas Buheitel (Diakonie Hochfranken) points out that loneliness turns into a severe problem when it is associated with lasting feelings of sadness and emptiness. When contact, exchanging with others or shared activities are missing, vitality can get lost and as a result, young people feel abandoned.

The problem

Why is it so hard to get out of loneliness?

Pastor Fiedler comments: “Togetherness cannot be produced, friendship cannot be forced and family bonds cannot simply be restored. Particularly those who do not want or are no longer able to socialise are struggling to get out of their loneliness and isolation.”

Alexandra Pape (Diakonie Hochfranken) explains this issue in more detail: “At some point, people affected do no longer have the strength to break out of this vicious circle and need professional psychological support, for example in psychotherapy or in counselling. On the other hand, chronically lonely people are almost invisible to their environment and the outer world, due to their social withdrawal. Their negative thought patterns and social misinterpretations make it very hard for them to come into contact with others. This also includes support systems. In many cases, there are also physical conditions or a lack of mobility which is hindering them in accessing existing support offers.

Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken summarises the basic problem: “Feelings of loneliness are often associated with shame. Why does it work for others, but not for me? Why does nobody like me? These inner questions or inner dialogues have negative effects on self-esteem and block the natural need for contact from being met. In persisting sadness, people are often lacking the energy to come into contact with others, which makes children and adolescents withdraw even more. Unfortunately, this causes a kind of problematic spiral which results in increasing withdrawal.”

According to Anne Browa (VHS Hofer Land e.V.), reversing a negative situation of loneliness gets the more difficult the longer it lasts. A lack of personal initiative and missing offers are reasons for a persisting situation.



Consequences

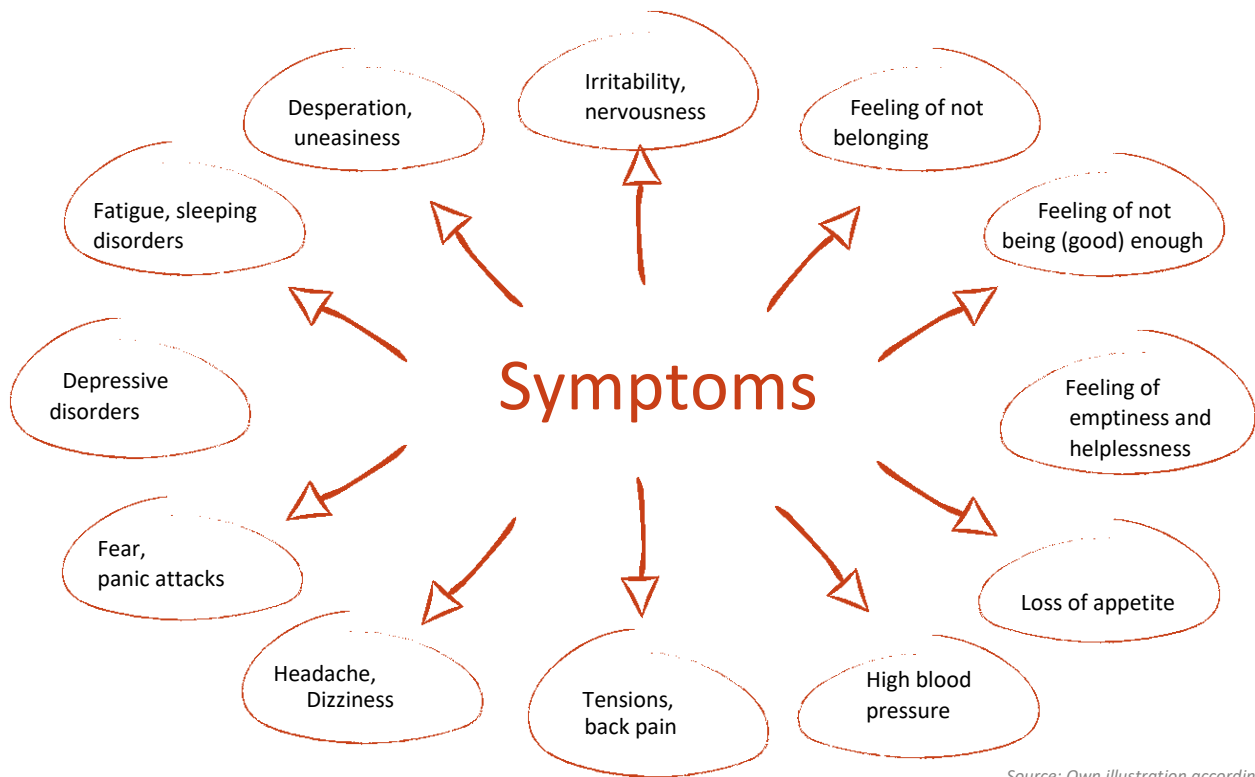
What are the effects of loneliness on your health?

As a result of the corona pandemic, our society is becoming increasingly aware of the issue of loneliness. The effects of social isolation are very diverse and individual. Our experts explain that loneliness can occur as a result of a previous disease, as well as itself increase the risk for consequences on physical and mental health if it becomes chronic. Which physical and emotional consequences are particularly important? How does loneliness present itself in different population groups?

Our local experts from various areas point to several different health consequences of loneliness. Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken describes physical and cognitive consequences. She explains that “a weakened immune systems, anxiety, alcohol abuse, cardiovascular diseases, cognitive impairment up to dementia, reduced life expectancy, depression (mutual effect) and suicidality” are only a few possible symptoms. Additionally, she reports an increased risk of getting into a downward spiral, as social interactions are often misinterpreted or perceived in a distorted manner, which increases awareness for social threats. “Social situations that are not perceived as notable by others are more often regarded as threatening and negative by chronically lonely people. As a result, they react with hostility or social withdrawal, which can in turn make their social environment turn away from them.”

Pastor Fiedler as well as Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. do not wish to make any concrete statements in this regard as they are not doctors. Mr. Fiedler adds his own observation of “loneliness often leading to great sadness, listlessness and a feeling of excessive demand.”

Andreas Buheitel sees the following effects of loneliness in his role at Diakonie Hochfranken: “Inner stress of children is increasing and can show itself as physical disorders or as a developing mental condition. Persisting feelings of loneliness can cause psychosomatic symptoms, for example headache or abdominal pain. Quite often, people affected have difficulties falling asleep and sleeping through, have trouble concentrating, or are showing lethargy or a lack of interest. The loss of vitality must also be a red flag for caregivers. Children and adolescents are then increasingly withdrawing themselves, are avoiding social situations or developing anxiety.”



Source: Own illustration according to <https://www.barmer.de/gesundheits-verstehen/psyche/einsamkeit/einsamkeit-koerper-1140310>

Increased risk for physical diseases:	Increased risk for mental diseases or impaired wellbeing:
•Metabolic diseases like diabetes mellitus type 2 •Cardiovascular diseases like stroke or high blood pressure •Diseases of the muscles and bones •Diseases of the immune system •Cancer	•Anxiety and depression •Negative emotions like worries, guilt, stress and nervousness •Dementia •Self-harm and suicidality

Source: “Wenn Einsamkeit krank macht - Bericht zu den gesundheitlichen Folgen von Einsamkeit in Bayern”, Bavarian state ministry for health and care, (2023), Munich

The signs and symptoms of loneliness can vary a lot between individuals and be unspecific at the same time. For this reason, it is even more important to reflect upon yourself, to evaluate your personal situation and, if needed, take measures to fight negative feelings and thoughts from early on. The following questions can help you reflect upon your own situation and find out whether you are affected by loneliness. If you find out that you are feeling lonely, it is key to talk about it and seek support, be it friends, family or professional help.

- How often do you spend time on your own without feeling lonely?
- Can you enjoy these times or do you perceive them as a burden?
- Do you have close relationships to friends or family, where you feel opened up and understood?
- Do you have trouble making social contacts or maintaining them?
- Do you feel uneasy when in company, even when you are with others?
- How often do you think about how lonely you feel and does this feeling affect your mood or your wellbeing?
- Which activities or interests do you pursue in your leisure time?
- Are there any possibilities to meet with like-minded people to share common interests and establish social connections?



Prevention

How can I prevent loneliness?

The question of how to prevent loneliness is key, especially in a time when social connections have often become more challenging. How should we deal with short-term feelings of loneliness and how can we actively prevent chronic loneliness? Our local experts show various perspectives and give helpful advice on this subject.

Alexandra Pape, expert at Diakonie Hochfranken, first points out that short-term feelings of loneliness can also be useful. They should be seen and accepted, instead of being denied or pushed away. Her preventive advice is “to question your own situation and, for example, make new contacts or intensify, change or even end existing relationships.” Furthermore, she advises to ensure a good and stable social network in each phase of life, to actively care for existing relationships but to also accept new contacts. She concludes: “It is vital to preserve our capability for interpersonal interactions and to maintain the feeling of emotional attachment to other people. Here, it does not matter so much how many contacts I have, but rather if these relationships are of a good quality.”

Pastor Fiedler names family cohesion, maintaining strong friendships as well as participation in clubs, groups or the parish as preventive measures. Anne Browa (VHS Hofer Land e.V.) has the following suggestions for not getting lonely: “Look for like-minded people, for example in sport, politics, religious communities, use the offering of local clubs, join hiking groups, regularly visit certain places (pubs for example) and keep your eyes open for suitable conversational partners, or make your own offering in clubs or as a teacher at the VHS – bring in your own competences.”

Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken describes the following preventive measures for children and adolescents: “Already in the baby and toddler age it is important for parents or meaningful caregivers to establish a secure relationship. This way, children can feel loved and accepted and make their way into the world starting from this secure basis. In their families, children acquire social skills early in life, for example when playing together, when planning and carrying out activities, when fighting and making up. Young people need the support of adults in starting and maintaining friendships, and they need to be encouraged to solve conflicts in peer groups and not to withdraw too quickly.”

Perception

Mindfulness and resilience

Regular mindfulness practices have positive effects on your health:

- Strengthening mental resilience
- Slowing down, relaxing and improved self-care
- Relief from depressions
- Improved emotional regulation
- Strengthening of the immune system
- Lower blood pressure

Our local experts have shown various ways for preventing loneliness at an early stage. Additionally, strengthening your personal resilience can be very helpful. Resilience is your own resistance against unfavourable circumstances and critical events in life. It can be supported by various mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness includes conscious awareness and observation of the present moment without judging it. Exercises can help you develop a more conscious understanding of your emotions and feelings. This can help you determine when you need support. Also, it enables you to talk more openly with others about your feelings. Mindfulness can also reduce the feeling of loneliness as you are establishing a deeper bond with yourself.

Source: <https://www.aok.de/pk/magazin/wohlbefinden/achtsamkeit/>



Meditation

Walking meditation is good way to integrate mindfulness practices into daily life. It is very similar to traditional sitting meditation. The most important part of walking meditation is to make yourself consciously aware of everything you smell, feel and see, just as if it were a little miracle. At the same time you can repeatedly ask yourself the following questions: “How do you actually walk? How do my feet move? How long is one breath as I take a step? Which feelings do I have? Which thoughts are going through my head?” The goal here is not to judge your perceptions, but rather to continuously observe them and to stay in the here and now. You can decide for yourself how long this exercise will take.

Source: <https://www.aok.de/pk/magazin/wohlbefinden/entspannung/gehmeditation-achtsamkeitsuebung-fuer-mehr-entspannung/>

There is a huge variety of mindfulness practices and meditation forms. We recommend to make your selection based on your individual needs and to choose your practices according to your personal preferences.

Perspectives

What can I do to reduce my own feelings of loneliness?

Although loneliness is a widespread problem which affects many people in their lives, it is often tabooed. Especially chronic loneliness can lead to health issues. For this reason, there are some important questions: What can I do myself to escape loneliness? Which possibilities do I have to get out of this emotional isolation together with others? Our experts in the Hof region have various strategies and measures on hand.

Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken suggests the following impulses: “Depending on your personal situation you might want to think about how to meet new people (for example by participating in a sports group, voluntary work, establishing a visiting service) or how to intensify existing contacts. In toxic or very single-sided relationships you might try to address this issue or even end that relationship. If your own social skills are declining, you might use the so-called “FFS rule” to improve them again. This means to get in contact with your Family, Friends or a Stranger once daily. This might be over the phone, a face-to-face conversation or a text message. You might want to critically question your own views and think about whether certain actions or dogmas are hindering you in your behaviour.” If it is not possible to get out of your loneliness by yourself, Alexandra Pape has the following advice: “Sometimes, people affected do not see a sense in their life. Then the question is: What brings my strength back and where his my motivation heading? If you do not manage to get out of the downward spiral by yourself, it is essential to accept external help. A first step here might be to confide to somebody close to you or to make use of counselling offers. In case of strong feelings of loneliness with signs of a depression, psychological psychotherapy is the most promising measure.”

Anne Browa (VHS Hofer Land e.V.) advises: “Make a collage of your goals or wishes to visualise your own needs. Take appropriate actions to satisfy them. Book a trip for single travellers, for example a coach trip, or join a hiking group.” Tanja Rakowitz at Rummelsberger Diakonie adds: “Voluntary work can be a chance to get out of loneliness.”

Andreas Buheitel, expert at Diakonie Hochfranken, has the following answer: “An essential first step is to confide to somebody else, not to be left alone with the feelings of loneliness and sadness. Just because of this, children and adolescents need caring adults who are listening to the worries of young people. At the same time you need to find concrete ways to come into more contact with others again: Who in my peer group might be encouraged to participate in joint activities and in which activities? Which clubs are there where I might feel well? How and where can I try and practise my skills for communicating with strangers?”



Finding ways

Finding potential ways out of your loneliness

Be mindful in discovering the world around you: Often we are so immersed in our thoughts and worries that we overlook the chances around us. By consciously paying attention to your environment, you will not only be able to see the small pleasures of daily life, but also identify occasions to come into contact with others. For example, this might be a friendly smile or a kind gesture to a stranger in the queue at the checkout.

Change your point of view: Reflect upon what is really important to you and which personal needs you have. Try to take on a new perspective and re-evaluate your situation. Talk about it with somebody you trust or turn to public support offerings. A conversation might help you find new ways out of your loneliness.

Take the courage to try out something new: Discover new leisure activities, try a new type of sport or go travelling. By participating in joint activities, you can meet people you already know or new people.

Revive previous relationships: Often, we tend to neglect friendships or contacts over time. However, these can be a valuable source for social relationships. Call old friends, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting or keep in touch via other ways. Reviving these connections can contribute to reduce loneliness and strengthen a feeling of belonging.

Foster your relationships in your neighbourhood and in your immediate surroundings: Sometimes we overlook the valuable contacts directly on our doorstep. A friendly conversation with neighbours, an offer for help or participating in local events can help build a supportive network in your immediate surroundings. These small gestures of closeness and solidarity can help reduce loneliness and foster a feeling of community.

Use of the possibilities of the digital world: In today's connected world, digital platforms and social media offer the chance to reach people remotely and to keep in touch. Use video calls, social media and online communities to keep in touch with friends and family, get acquainted with new people and share your interests. However, please be aware that digital relationships cannot replace real and personal interaction.



Join a club: No matter if it is a sports club, a cultural club or charity – becoming a member of a club gives you the chance to meet like-minded people and share common interests. It is a great way to escape social isolation and feel welcomed in a community. A club may not only foster your passions, but can also enable you to find new friends and a broader social network.

Support your fellow human beings: Support your fellow human beings in order to reduce your own loneliness and do something good at the same time. Often, it is helpful to concentrate on others, be it in voluntary work, offering your help in the neighbourhood or listening to the worries and needs of friends and family. By giving and sharing, you can not only improve the quality of life of others, but also create a more fulfilling social life for yourself. Supporting your fellow human beings helps you connect with them and encourages a feeling of community that counteracts loneliness.

Intensify your connections to colleagues and workmates: We spend a big part of our time with our colleagues and workmates. For this reason it is vital to foster and strengthen these relationships as well. Take your time for conversations, team activities or have your break together in order to get to know your colleagues better. These connections may not only improve collaboration at work, but may also create a feeling of belonging at your workplace.

Source: <https://www.stmgp.bayern.de/vorsorge/einsamkeit/>

Support

How can I help if somebody I know is affected by loneliness?

When we see that somebody in our surroundings is affected by feelings of loneliness, we often want to offer help and support. What can we do when we think that somebody is lonely? What can we actually do to reduce their loneliness? Our experts have put together several ways for doing so.

If you notice signs of loneliness in somebody, like increasing dissociation, withdrawal, uneasiness, resistance or an unkempt appearance, Alexandra Pape (Diakonie Hochfranken) advises to first seek a one-to-one conversation in which you express your worries and offer help. She also says: “On the one hand, you need to show real interest and sympathy for this person, on the other hand you need to be sensitive for the limits the other person shows you. After a first refusal you might want to carefully enquire again after some time. If you are in good contact with the person affected, you might encourage them to take the first steps and point to existing support offerings and maybe even accompany them at a first appointment.”



Pastor Fiedler advises: “It is best to approach this person and get into a conversation, being an honest conversation partner. Here, a lot depends on your own intuition and empathy.” Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. provides the following possibilities for help: “Invite them to have “a cup of coffee”. Find out what their interests are and research associated offerings. When there is a basis of trust, you can “pull” them with you. IMPORTANT: The person must not be overwhelmed. Otherwise, the exact opposite of what you wish for this person might be happening.” How do I know that somebody is lonely? “Changes in the personal surroundings of people, withdrawal from the public or the person talking openly about it.”

When it comes to minors, Andreas Buheitel at Diakonie Hochfranken explains: “Adults, parents, but also teachers in the nursery or at school can seek conversations with children and adolescents and offer support. It is helpful to understand young people and their feelings and to not try to hastily push them into any offerings. When children and adolescents feel understood, it contributes to relaxation and might possibly produce own ideas which can be supported.”

Tanja Rakowitz at Rummelsberger Diakonie adds the aspect of need for care: “If somebody feels lonely because they are in need of care, there is the possibility, for example, to request support by volunteers or to join special groups, like caring groups. The specialist unit for family caregivers is responsible here.”

Animals

How do animals affect the wellbeing of lonely people?



Which special effect does contact with animals have on lonely people? Does contact with animals provide special comfort and a feeling of attachment? What are the limits and chances of relationships between animals and humans when it comes to reducing loneliness? Our experts share their valuable knowledge about these exciting questions.



Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken describes several positive aspects: “Contact with pets can fulfil some essential needs of humans, especially the need for closeness, attention, safety and comfort. Looking after an animal can give people’s life a meaning. Consequently, people with pets are less suffering from loneliness. Pets have physiological effects on their owners that can be directly measured.” However, Alexandra Pape does not consider pets as a universal remedy. It must also be ensured that the animal is cared for in a way appropriate to its species. She recommends to slowly approach the subject by practically supporting animal shelters. Lastly, Alexandra Pape adds that pets can generally ensure more social contacts as the animal is often a door-opener to easier conversations.

And Pastor Fiedler says: “Animals can fill an emptiness in life, but usually, they are no replacement for real human interactions.”

Anne Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. gives the following examples for how animals can help in loneliness: “The project “Erinnerungstiere” (animals of memory) by the small animal zoo of Hof is very well received. Obviously, animals are good in motivating. Dog owners meet regularly to take their dogs for a walk and in many cases, they also have time for a quick chat. Many people talk to their animals and treat them like a partner or a child. Being responsible for an animal can bring people out of their loneliness (vet, exchanging experiences when there are problems).”

Andreas Buheitel (Diakonie Hochfranken) adds: “Children and adolescents often have an intense contact to animals. They feel understood as animals react without prejudice on the loving attention of young people. A 15 year-old girl told me: “My dog does not care how I look, if I am too fat or ugly. He sees the good sides of me.” Stroking animals and the physical contact have a relaxing effect on your body, mind and spirit.”

Voluntary work

Activities and voluntary work

Experiencing loneliness can be very challenging for many people. But there are ways out of this isolation. Social activities and voluntary work in your community can contribute to making new social relationships and overcoming loneliness. According to the “Freiwilligensurvey 2019”, about 41 % of the Bavarian citizens from the age of 14 are engaging in voluntary work. This corresponds to about 4.7 million people. This is a big community that not only offers the chance to help others, but it is also a great chance for yourself to find new friends and make new relationships.

The “Koordinierungszentrum Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (KoBE)” (coordination centre for citizen engagement) in the district of Hof is the central point of contact for all questions around voluntary work and supports you in finding and implementing concrete possibilities for citizen engagement. Further information can be found on their website at www.kobe-lkr-hof.de. The platform FlexHero can also help you find various voluntary projects and activities. Find out more in their app, available at www.flexhero.de.

Another possibility that might help you overcome your loneliness is the “map of offerings” by the “Kompetenznetzwerk Einsamkeit” (competence network for loneliness). On their website www.kompetenznetz-einsamkeit.de/angebotslandkarte you can find activities relating to events in your area, where the aim is to foster social connections and reduce loneliness.

Additionally, the events and classes of the Volkshochschule Hofer Land e.V. provide great possibilities to acquire new skills and to meet people with similar interests. The sponsorship project “Wege miteinander” (going your way together) by VHS Hofer Land e.V. is offering a broad range of various interesting subjects for all age groups. Please see www.vhshoferland.de for more detailed information about the project and the classes.

A cultural partnership in the district of Hof is a great chance to accompany elderly people at cultural events and events of daily life so that they do not need to be lonely. In this kind and warm programme you will be trained as a cultural patron, and in a permanent tandem with your cultural guest you are discovering the cultural diversity of the area and creating an enriching experience for both sides. For further information, please contact the coordination office for the elderly at the district administration of Hof, phone 09281/57-424, or visit www.landkreis-hof.de/unsere-themen/senioren-inklusion/.

Community

Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken tells us about various activities and meeting places in the Hof region. Health classes offered by statutory health insurances can not only be good for your physical wellbeing. They are a chance to meet like-minded people as well. Please contact your health insurance for more information about offers in your area. Furthermore, the social-psychiatric service of Hof has group offerings tailored to the needs of the community. And the local church parishes are also organising meetings and group activities that provide a sense of belonging and support.

The “Mehrgenerationenhäuser” (houses for all generations) in the district and the municipality of Hof foster an exchange between different age groups and create a lively community.

Meetings for young people and the elderly, arranged by various organisations like the Hospitalstiftung Hof and the church parishes, are great places to be in company and to spend time together. Last but not least, club offerings in animal shelters, sports clubs, music clubs or cultural clubs give you the chance to share your interests and find new friends.

Make yourself aware of your wishes and needs and actively use the diverse offerings in your area. You are not alone on your way out of loneliness. The community in the Hof region offers many ways to experience a sense of attachment and friendship.



The Hof region

Contact persons and institutions in the Hof region

Just as in many areas of life, people have different ways of dealing with loneliness. It can be overcome in many different ways. The more important it is to know which contact points and institutions in the Hof region you can turn to when you are lonely and where you can find concrete help. The following overview of various local support possibilities has been provided by our experts.

Anna Browa at VHS Hofer Land e.V. names the following contact points: “Institutions by the church, representatives for the elderly at local governments, counselling centres by Diakonie or Caritas, WEGE miteinander – sponsorship project of VHS Hofer Land e.V.” From the view of the Catholic Church, Pastor Fiedler adds: “If you feel lonely, you can contact the professional pastoral workers in our parish and the employees of the Caritas association.”

Andreas Buheitel describes the offerings of his institution: “The counselling centre for education, young people and families by Diakonie Hochfranken is there to help. In a conversation with experienced counsellors we look for possible solutions and ways out of your loneliness. Another offering is online counselling by our institution, or online counselling by the BKE (Bundeskongferenz für Erziehungsberatung, federal conference for educational counselling): www.bke-jugendberatung.de. Here, you can meet other adolescents with similar issues online or have a personal chat with a counsellor.”

Tanja Rakowitz at Rummelsberger Diakonie reminds us of the specialist unit for family carers, which acts as an agent in finding voluntary workers for you, and also offers caring groups, for example.



Talk to your friends,
family or an expert about your feelings.
Find people who are in the same situation
as you are. Ask yourself what would make
you feel particularly good. Be proactive and
get in touch with contact points. They can
be at your side and support you on your
way.

Alexandra Pape at Diakonie Hochfranken knows: “The reasons for increasingly stronger feelings of loneliness are very individual and diverse [...]. For this reason, the appropriate measures can be very diverse as well. Depending on what made somebody feel lonely, different contact points, institutions and activities can be helpful.” She lists a selection of offerings:

•**Psychological psychotherapists**

Talk to your general practitioner and ask them to refer you to psychotherapy if you are chronically lonely. Ask your health insurance for a list of established therapists.

•**Counselling centres of Diakonie Hochfranken:**

Counselling for the unemployed, counselling for married couples, partners and life, complementary independent participation counselling (EUTB), educational and family counselling, emergency call for women, general social work by the church (KASA), immigration counselling, care service unit, debt and insolvency counselling, counselling for the pregnant (in conflict), contact point for self-help, social-psychiatric service (with gerontopsychiatric counselling and gerontopsychiatric specialist coordination for Upper Franconia), addiction counselling, counselling for separation and divorce

•**Counselling centres of Caritas for the municipality and district of Hof:**

General social counselling, railway mission, specialist unit for family carers, refugee and integration counselling, immigration service for the young, care service for treatment and recovery, counselling for the elderly

•**Control centre for care:**

Specialist unit for dementia and care for Upper Franconia, specialist units for family carers, care network for the municipality and district of Hof, care support point, coordination/representatives for the elderly, independent psychiatric complaints office (upB), housing counselling



For further information about loneliness please visit the website of the Bavarian state ministry for health and care at www.stmgp.bayern.de/vorsorge/einsamkeit/ or the website of the Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit at www.kompetenznetz-einsamkeit.de/.

Local contact information:

Bezirksklinik Rehau – Specialised hospital for psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychosomatics, Fohrenreuther Straße 48 • 95111 Rehau
Phone: 09283/599-0
Email: rehau@gebo-med.de
www.gebo-med.de

Caritasverband Stadt- und Landkreis Hof e.V.
General social counselling
Marienstraße 56 • 95028 Hof
Phone: 09281/14017-14
Email: v.lehmann@caritas-hof.de
www.caritas-hof.de/einrichtungen/

Caritasverband Stadt- und Landkreis Hof e.V.
Counselling for the elderly
Marienstraße 56 • 95028 Hof
Phone: 0176/18108489
Email: c.grimm@caritas-hof.de
www.caritas-hof.de/einrichtungen/seniorenberatung

Diakonie Hochfranken – Erziehungs-, Jugend- und Familienberatung gGmbH
Schellenbergweg 20 • 95028 Hof
Phone: 09281/160 710 200
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www.diakonie-hochfranken.de/kinder-und-jugendliche/beratung-und-familienhilfe/erziehungs-und-familienberatung

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www.diakonie-hochfranken.de/beratung-hilfe/selbsthilfekontaktstelle/

Diakonie Hochfranken Erwachsenenhilfe gGmbH – Social-psychiatric service Hof
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www.diakonie-hochfranken.de/erwachsene/sozialpsychiatrie/sozialpsychiatrischer-dienst

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Phone: 09281/5469949
Email: info@leitstelle-pflege.de
www.leitstelle-pflege.de

Katholischer Seelsorgebereich Hofer Land
Nailaer Straße 7 • 95030 Hof
Phone: 09281/7067-0
Email: ssb.hofer-land@erzbistum-bamberg.de
www.ssb-hoferland.de/ansprechpartner/pastorales-personal/

Koordinierungszentrum Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (KoBE): Landratsamt Hof, room 105/107 – 1st floor Schaumburgstraße 14 • 95032 Hof
Phone: 09281/57-335
Email: heinrich.wolf@landkreis-hof.de
www.kobe-lkr-hof.de

Die Rummelsberger Dienste für Menschen im Alter gGmbH
Specialised unit for family caregivers
Gartenstraße 12-14 • 95111 Rehau
Phone: 09283/597093
Email: diakoniestation-rehau@rummelsberger.net
www.rummelsberger-diakonie.de/fs-rehau

Seniorenkoordination Landkreis Hof
(Kulturpatenschaften) Schaumburgstraße 14 • 95032 Hof
Phone: 09281/57-424
Email: lisa-maria.moritz@landkreis-hof.de

Seelsorgetelefon Evangelisches Dekanat Hof
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www.dekanat-hof.de/arbeitsbereiche/seelsorge

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Phone: 0800/6553000
www.krisendienste.bayern

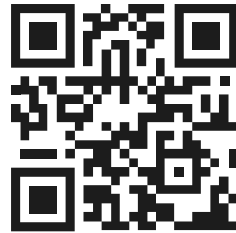
Krisenchat, for children, adolescents and young adults
www.krisenchat.de

Nummer gegen Kummer
For children and adolescents
Phone: 116111
For parents Phone: 0800/1110550
www.nummergegenkummer.de

Silbernetz e.V.
For people from 60 years of age
Phone: 0800/4708090
Email: kontakt@silbernetz.de
www.silbernetz.org

TelefonSeelsorge Deutschland e.V.
Phone: 0800/1110111, 0800/1110222 or 116123
www.telefonseelsorge.de

We would appreciate if you could take two minutes of your time and share your feedback about this booklet: <https://t1p.de/3cxq7>



Thank you very much!

An electronic version of this booklet about loneliness is available in German and English on ***www.gesundheitsregion.plus***.



Imprint

Booklet about loneliness

Published by: Gesundheitsregion Plus Hofer Land
Schaumbergstraße 14, 95032 Hof

Phone: 09281/57-167 Fax: 09281/57-11-167

Email: gesundheitsregionenplus@landkreis-hof.de

Texts: Gesundheitsregion Plus Hofer Land

Layout: Kristiane Rubner Design

Printed by: Pauli Offsetdruck e.K., Oberkotzau

1st edition

Year of publication: 2023



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