



advice and support for older age

**Independent
Age**

Factsheet

How to stay socially connected

Social groups, activities and befriending services for older people.

Call FREE on **0800 319 6789** Visit **www.independentage.org**

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About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago,
we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru
(0800 022 3444, ageuk.org.uk/cymru)
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland
(0800 12 44 222, ageuk.org.uk/scotland).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI
(0808 808 7575, ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland).

In this factsheet, you'll find reference to our other free publications. You can order them by calling 0800 319 6789, or by visiting independentage.org/information

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1. Why staying connected is important

Social contact is very important. Having a network of good relationships improves our wellbeing and can even help keep our minds active.

Being alone doesn't always mean you'll feel lonely, but social isolation can lead to loneliness. This might happen if you end up spending more time on your own than you'd like to, but it's also possible to feel lonely even if you're surrounded by people. Loneliness happens when you don't have the type or amount of social contact that you'd like.

Loneliness can affect anyone. It can happen for many different reasons and at any age. However, as you get older, common life events may make you more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. For example:

- the death of a partner or someone else you're close to
- adjusting to life after retirement, including seeing fewer people on a daily basis
- health or mobility problems, making it harder to get out and about.

Thankfully, there are lots of organisations and services out there to help older people connect with others, and most cost very little or nothing at all. Staying connected is good for our health and can bring a sense of contentment to our lives.

This factsheet lists some social activities and befriending services that may be of interest and includes some practical steps that can help you feel more connected.

If none of these seem right for you or you want more information, you can phone our free Helpline on [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789) to arrange to speak to an adviser. They can tell you about all

the support out there that's relevant for you. You could also take a look at our guide **If you're feeling lonely**.

2. Social groups and activities

These organisations offer a range of activities you may enjoy. They may help you to meet new people and make new friends.

Book clubs are run by some local libraries and Age UKs (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area). Some have particular specialisms, such as crime fiction or science fiction. Contact your local library (gov.uk/local-library-services) or Age UK to find out what they have on offer.

Contact the Elderly (0800 716543, contact-the-elderly.org.uk) organise monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for people over 75 who live with little or no social support. The tea parties are hosted by volunteers, and drivers are available to pick you up and take you home afterwards.

Day centres or community centres may be run by a local council or charity to offer you an opportunity to socialise. They're usually aimed at particular groups that might benefit from these services, such as older people, people with dementia, or people from a particular cultural group. The activities these centres provide will vary. For example, they may offer lunch clubs, arts and crafts, or practical services like hairdressing and footcare. Check with your council (gov.uk/find-local-council) to find out what is available.

English Bridge Union (01296 317200, www.ebu.co.uk) can help you find a local bridge club whether you're a keen player or enthusiastic beginner.

Extend (01582 832760, extend.org.uk) offers gentle exercise classes for older people and disabled people, no matter what your fitness level. Regular weekly classes are a good way to meet new people.

Lunch clubs are sometimes provided locally by your local council, Age UK (0800 169 6565) or the Royal Voluntary Service (0845 608 0122, royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk).

Making Music (020 7939 6030, makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list) has a database of amateur music groups across the UK, including choirs and local festivals.

Men's Sheds (0300 772 9626, menssheds.org.uk) provide a place for men to work on practical projects at their own pace in a friendly supportive venue or simply to meet new friends. Visit their website or give them a call to find out if there is one in your area.

National Association of Choirs

(nationalassociationofchoirs.org.uk) has a database of over 750 choirs and can help you find a local choir. They also have details of events.

Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline (0300 330 0630, switchboard.lgbt) can provide details of local social and support groups for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans. Or you can give them a ring to talk about anything on your mind.

Thrive (0118 988 5688, thrive.org.uk) runs gardening programmes for people who are isolated or have disabilities, including sight or hearing loss or dementia. They have three regional centres and also run community projects. They can also put you in touch with garden projects in your local area.

UK Handknitting Association (ukhandknitting.com) has information about knitting groups and events for beginners and experienced knitters and crocheters.

Walking for Health (020 7339 8541, walkingforhealth.org.uk) provides free short walks – many as short as half an hour – for anyone who wants to join in. The walks tend to start at a central point, like a community centre or library, are led by a trained volunteer and are open to all, regardless of age, ability or health conditions.

The Women's Institute (WI) (020 7371 9300, thewi.org.uk) runs interesting events and activities for women to learn about arts, crafting, science, sports and leisure. You can visit local

groups to find one that's right for you before you pay to become a member.

Your local Age UK (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk) may run social events, lunch clubs or exercise groups for older people or know of local activities you could join. Age UK also has friendship centres that organise their own activities such as lunches, outings, walks and bowling.

Volunteering can be a good way to connect with others while doing something valuable. It may give you the opportunity to use your skills and past experience and learn new skills too.

Many of the organisations listed in chapters 2 and 3 have volunteering opportunities.

- To find out about volunteering for Independent Age, visit independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering-opportunities. To apply to volunteer, call 0800 319 6789 or apply online at independentage.org/get-involved/apply-to-be-a-volunteer. You could also help us to develop our information guides by joining our Readers' Panel. Call us for more information or visit independentage.org/readers-panel.
- Search for volunteering opportunities in your area at do-it.org.uk, or by contacting your nearest NCVO Volunteer Centre (020 7713 6161, ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre).
- RSVP (the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme) has details of volunteering opportunities for people over 50. Call them on 020 3780 5870 or visit volunteermatters.org.uk/pillars/older-people.

3. Courses and classes

You might want to learn a skill or continue your studies. This can help you to stay connected to other people as well as keeping your mind active.

- The University of the Third Age (U3A) ([020 8466 6139](tel:02084666139), u3a.org.uk) is a national network of learning groups run by retired volunteers providing creative, educational and leisure opportunities in a friendly environment. Membership is cheap and it's a great way to meet new people and keep your mind active.
- hotcourses.com lets you search for hobby and vocational courses across the UK.
- OpenLearn from the Open University has a number of free online courses for you to study (open.edu/openlearn).
- Gov.uk has information on where to find university courses and funding help that may be available to you (gov.uk/mature-student-university-funding).

4. Befriending

If you'd like some company, a chat on the phone or a chance to meet new people, there are plenty of organisations that can help.

Independent Age offers friendship services to provide you with regular company. Our trained volunteers phone, or sometimes visit people regularly at an agreed time for a friendly chat. Call us on [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789) or visit independentage.org if you think you might like a volunteer and to discuss what might be available to you.

Age UK runs a Call in Time phone service for over-60s, offering a weekly call from a volunteer. Call them on [0800 434 6105](tel:08004346105) (or visit ageuk.org.uk) to find out about this. Call them on [0800 169 6565](tel:08001696565) to find out about the other face-to-face and telephone befriending services that may be on offer through local Age UKs.

Mind offers a range of services to people living with mental health problems through its network of 135 local Minds. Some areas have befriending and peer support schemes. Call them on [0300 123 3393](tel:03001233393) or visit mind.org.uk to see if there's a scheme in your area.

Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) provides services for older people including befriending, Good Neighbours and Community Companions Schemes, practical help at home – such as giving you a lift to a hospital appointment – lunch clubs and advice centres. Call [0845 608 0122](tel:08456080122) or visit royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk to find out what's available in your area.

5. Emotional support

These organisations offer emotional support if you're going through a difficult time.

If you're a carer

Carers Trust and Carers UK offer support to people caring for a friend or relative. Carers Trust ([0300 772 9600](tel:03007729600), carers.org) has online information and a network of local services offering practical support to carers. Carers UK has a national helpline providing information and advice and an online forum ([0808 808 7777](tel:08088087777), carersuk.org).

If you've been bereaved

Cruse Bereavement Care can support you after the death of someone close. They offer emotional support over the phone, face-to-face, by email and in groups. Call their helpline on [0808 808 1677](tel:08088081677) or visit cruse.org.uk.

Our free guide **Coping with bereavement** looks at how you might be feeling and has suggestions for where you can go for comfort and support.

For relationship advice

Relate can provide help with any difficulties in your relationships. Their services cover all relationships, not just couple relationships. They offer face-to-face counselling as well as counselling services by telephone, email or online. Call [0300 100 1234](tel:03001001234) or visit relate.org.uk/relationship-help.

For general support

Samaritans provide confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24/7. You don't have to be depressed or suicidal to call them – they're happy to talk through anything that's bothering you. Just call free on **116 123**. For more information visit samaritans.org.

The Silver Line is a free, confidential helpline for older people offering information, advice, friendship or just a good chat. It's open 24/7. Call **0800 470 8090** or visit thesilverline.org.uk. They also run a Silver Letters service, where you exchange regular letters with a volunteer.

If you have an illness

There are charities that support people with a number of different illnesses. Some of them run support groups, giving you a chance to talk to others in about your experiences and concerns. For example, Parkinson's UK supports people living with Parkinson's (**0808 800 0303**, parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/local-groups) and Macmillan supports people affected by cancer (**0808 808 0000**, macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/talking-about-cancer/find-groups-and-talks-near-you).

6. Other practical steps you can take

Feeling lonely or alone is a common experience that many people go through. You may have felt this way for a long time, or it may be something that comes and goes.

Loneliness isn't anything to be ashamed of; it's a normal human experience and there is action you can take to improve things.

Our free, practical guide **If you're feeling lonely** is packed with advice on things you can try to help reduce loneliness, as well as information about where you can go to get help. You can also try some of the practical steps described below to help stay connected.

Think about what you enjoy

The cinema? Shopping? Going for a meal? Whatever it is, reach out and invite someone to do it with you. Chances are you know at least one person in the same boat as you who'd love to go out and often all it takes is an invitation or two to make it happen. Remember you may be entitled to senior discounts at cinemas, theatres, museums, hairdressers and more – so make sure you ask!

Plan ahead

Try to book in one activity a day or spread your activities over the week. You could also try booking in something for, say, every Sunday, if that's the day you feel most alone. Doing this could keep you from feeling down and give you something to look forward to.

Look after yourself

It may sound obvious, but taking small steps to eat well, exercise gently and keep active can help you feel better about yourself, sleep better and relax more fully in your own company. Many sports centres and community centres have fitness classes for older people so it's worth finding out about these.

Get online

For many people, the internet is a great way to connect with people and make new friends. There are forums and social networks where you can chat to people with similar interests. For example, Gransnet (not just for grans) is an online social network for over-50s. Use common sense about what you share and don't give out personal information or your bank details. The Online Centres Network can help you learn basic computer skills. Call [0114 349 1666](tel:01143491666) or visit onlinecentresnetwork.org.

Find out about community transport in your area

If you can't drive or don't have accessible public transport, community transport is a safe and low-cost way to get to the shops, hospital and other local places. Call the Community Transport Association on [0161 351 1475](tel:01613511475) or visit ctauk.org to find out what's available in your area. You can also search online at gov.uk/community-transport-services-shopmobility.

Look for activities in your community

To find out what local activities are being planned have a look at your local library or community centre. If you feel nervous, try one thing at a time while you build up your confidence. You could also talk to someone who is organising the activity so you get to know at least one person before you go.

If you're looking for community events on Christmas Day, Community Christmas can help you find out what's happening in your area ([0800 063 9285](tel:08000639285), communitychristmas.org.uk).

Claim the money you're entitled to

Call the Independent Age Helpline and arrange to speak to an adviser ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789)) to check you're claiming all the benefits you're due, especially if you're struggling to make ends meet. After all, a little extra money might mean being able to afford tea and cake in a cafe once a week with a friend, or the membership fee to your local University of the Third Age group.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request. Contact us using the details below.

Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this information was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us

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