

Social Isolation

Candidate Name:

SCN:

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Risk factors and positive actions in relation to social isolation

Although social isolation is most common in the elderly, younger adults (eg, housebound and disabled due to multiple sclerosis or a single mother of young children) may also be affected by both social isolation and loneliness. Reduced social contact, being alone, isolation and feelings of loneliness are associated with reduced quality of life.

Loneliness refers to how individuals evaluate their level and quality of social contact. Social isolation can be more accurately measured (eg, by the number of social contacts the person has). Well-being may not be positively correlated with social contact and a great deal depends on the nature of the contacts made.

For some people, solitude is a way of life which temperamentally suits them and they may not feel lonely even if they have no visitors.

General practitioners and community nurses are in a unique position to identify loneliness, as they are in contact with the three groups most at risk - ie very old people, bereaved people, and people with disabilities.

- The extent of loneliness amongst older people has been stable in the last 60 years. Only 7% of older people report severe loneliness and there is no evidence to suggest that older people are lonelier now than in the past.^[2]
- Loneliness is common in carers, especially resident carers. Other groups at risk of loneliness include older married women, older people who live with married children, those living in sheltered housing or residential care and older people who emigrated from other countries (especially those who do not speak the language well).
- Loneliness seems to be less prevalent in those rural areas where a sense of community still remains than it is in more densely populated urban areas.
- Lack of money limits the opportunities for overcoming loneliness: those on lower incomes are more prone to feelings of loneliness than those who are better off

Consider loneliness in any isolated person, especially the housebound. Possible signs of loneliness include:

- Verbal outpouring
- Prolonged holding of your hand or arm
- Body language: defeated demeanour, tightly crossed arms and legs
- Drab clothing

A review found that educational and social activity group interventions that target specific groups of people can alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older people. The effectiveness of home visiting and befriending schemes was unclear.

Wherever possible, lonely people should be offered opportunities to reach out to others so that they retain active involvement in the pattern of their own lives, rather than sitting passively waiting for the doorbell to ring. Lonely people may need encouragement and guidance on how to be creative and how to have a positive approach to meeting others:

- Being nice to people, and taking trouble to find out their hopes and fears.
 - Local groups (eg, mother and toddler groups) may provide a social network for isolated mothers.
 - Establishing what facilities already exist (eg, the local pub, a day centre or a lunch club). It doesn't matter initially whether they get anything out of a social interaction, as they may meet someone of like mind, so enabling these artificial crutches to be thrown away.
 - As well as receiving visitors and telephone calls and going on outings, lonely elderly people may be helped by choosing to become pet owners.
 - Alternative therapies (eg, massage and aromatherapy) can relieve loneliness.
 - Befriending schemes can be very helpful to those who are housebound. They can be contacted through the local Age UK group, local churches (in some areas the Methodist church has 'live at home' schemes), or community care schemes linked to the area office of the social services department.
 - One way that housebound people can feel useful is through offering telephone support to others who are isolated, such as carers or other older housebound people. Another useful activity is letter writing, perhaps for a worthy cause (such as Amnesty International) or corresponding with a pen pal.
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- Technology forums such as the internet may provide relief from boredom and loneliness.
 - Getting a telephone: not only gives the reassurance of being able to request help in an emergency, but also allows the opportunity to chat to friends and family. Some local authorities offer financial help with installation costs.
 - Social isolation has been shown to have a detrimental effect on health and well-being.

- Both isolation and loneliness impair quality of life and well-being. However only social isolation (and not loneliness) has been shown to be associated with increased mortality.
- Depression is associated with loneliness and social isolation.
- Potential suicide risk.
- Lonely and isolated elderly people are at risk of nutritional problems.

Leaving prison may also leave you with problem of social isolation. Unfortunately when you move into a community people will talk, i.e. “have you seen the new neighbour, do you know they have just came out of prison, I don’t know if I trust them, do you think they takes drugs, you better keep your door locked they might rob us.”

You’re not going to stop the talk unfortunately it is up to you to build confidence in your new neighbours.

Start off with little things be polite and respectful, say hello to them when you meet them, ask if they would like you to take their bin out when you take yours out, keep your area clean and tidy, don’t have rowdy parties. If you have friend round keep the noise down.

You can have a look and see if there is any charities or anything of that nature you could volunteer to help with, word will get round you’re not such a bad person, it may take time but eventually you will become part of the community.

As a group lets discuss what the group feels social isolation is and what may contribute to social isolation, this should include; what the indicators are; what the risk factors are leading to this; what can you do to cope with social isolation and what action could you take to prevent this happening.

Social isolation

What are the risk factors	What lead to this
1	
2	
3	
How can you cope with social isolation	What actions can you take to avoid this
1	
2	
3	

Write down in the box below what you think three or more indicator of social isolation might be.

Indicators of social isolation	Reason why you think this is a factor
1	
2	
3	
4	

What do you think the risk factors are that can lead to social isolation? Try to list as many as you can giving at least 3 risk factors

Risk factor leading to social isolation	Reasons why you believe this
1	
2	
3	
4	

With all that has been discussed through this unit can you now 2 of your personal strengths and areas you feel you need to improve on and why.

Personal strengths	Strengths needing improvement
1	1
2	2

To prepare you for living in a new community we are all going to participate in an activity, this activity will be chosen for you but you will decide amongst yourself what part each of you take in this activity. Each of you will be assessed on your participation and your performance throughout.

We will now participate in a community activity, as the setting we are currently working in may limit this; we have therefore decided that you will cook a meal for an invited group of people including yourselves. As a group you will decide what meal you are going to provide (taken from the recipe booklet) as a group you will decide what part each person will take in the preparation and after the meal has been served, you may also sit and have a meal with your guests

After the meal you will ask your guests for feedback on the meal and the friendliness of the service. All washing up to be completed by the whole group.

Name.....	Assessors observation
Did they take part in the discussion on which meal should be offered	
What part did they take in the preparation	
What part did they take in the cooking	
Did they interact with the group	
Did they interact with them during the meal	
Did they ask the guests for feedback	
Did they take part in the clearing up and washing	

We may have conducted this exercise within a restricted environment but it will be very similar when you move into a new community.

We are not saying make everyone a meal, but take part in the community, volunteering, cleaning the area up, taking out the neighbours bin, cutting their grass when you cut your own, cleaning down communal areas. Be respectful to them i.e. no loud music or big parties, and make sure your friends respect your neighbours as well, even noisy friend will show a bad light on you not them.