

Tips for students

'I felt left out': how to cope with loneliness at university

There is growing evidence that feeling isolated can affect our health and even job prospects. But help is available

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Fri 11 May 2018 12.04 BST



University can be a lonely place, with the move away from home, deadlines and the pressure to go out every night. This can affect your mental health and even future job prospects, according to a [recent study](#). And the problem of young people feeling lonely “may well be getting worse”, says Kate Jopling, loneliness expert and former director of the Campaign to End Loneliness. Getting out of the rut isn’t always easy, but there are ways students can help themselves. Experts and students share their advice.

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Join clubs and societies

Pressure to drink and go out can be tough, especially for new students. “I got a bit left out and had nights in on my own, sat in with no one to talk to,” says Amy Jones, a recent graduate. Jones found it difficult to connect with other freshers. “You’re sort of seen as an outcast if you don’t drink or don’t go out,” she says.

Clubs and societies at university can provide an alternative. Stephen Buckley, head of information at the mental health charity Mind, also recommends volunteering. “Helping out with a charity or good cause can help you feel good and give you a chance to meet new people,” he says. Websites (such as [do-it.org](#)), your local library, students’ union or local newspapers will advertise opportunities.

For master’s students in particular, social opportunities can be lacking. Classes outside university are another option. “If I was starting my master’s again, I would make an effort to do a class, like yoga or krav maga, outside of university,” says Jordan Gass-Poore, a student at City, University of London.

Nurture relationships

Studying might involve moving city or country, leaving your support network of friends and family behind. Putting work into relationships is key to improving your social circle, says Jopling. “We can be quite careless in our social relationships and not recognise how vital they are. We need to get better at thinking about how much time and effort we put into making sure that we have the right people around us.”

Sleep and eat well

There is growing evidence that loneliness is bad for our health, says Jopling, and feeling lonely also leads to unhealthy behaviour. “If you’re lonely, you’re more likely to smoke and drink, less likely to eat vegetables, less likely to take physical exercise. It also links directly to things like cardiovascular disease, dementia and depression.”

While loneliness isn’t itself a mental health problem, the two are often strongly connected. “I became more anxious and depressed, and I would sit in bed and miss lectures,” says Jones.

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Getting enough sleep is also key to stopping yourself from feeling overwhelmed, says Buckley: “It is easy as a student to get caught up with going to bed late then getting up early for lectures, but sleep is vital. If you’re tired, your worries can get blown out of proportion.”

Take breaks from work

Setting time aside is a good way to minimise stress and make space for important social experiences. “Try to start your revision in plenty of time. But even the best-made plans can be disrupted by unexpected events - this is OK,” says Buckley. “Planning your revision timetable with some spare space will help you feel calm when you need to make changes.”

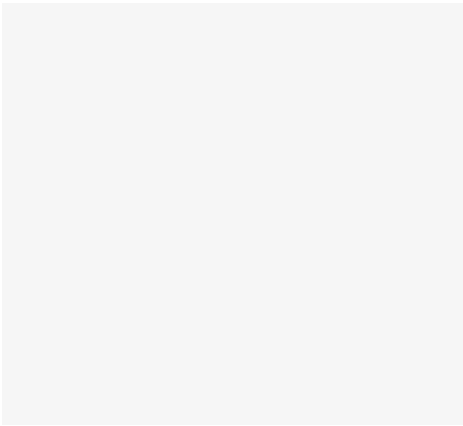
Most universities will have a wellbeing service providing free therapy and drop-ins. Many also have a nightline to provide support throughout the night. You can also talk to your GP, who can tell you what support is available.

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