

lonely **NOT** **ALONE**

One Small Step: Online Story-Sharing Session Plans for
Youth Workers and Creative Leaders

Lonely Not Alone is a Co-op Foundation campaign created in partnership with young people and specialist co-design agency, Effervescent. Thank you to our partners for your continued support.



www.lonelynotalone.org

An introduction to Lonely Not Alone



Foundation

The Co-op Foundation's Lonely Not Alone campaign is made by young people, for young people, to tackle the stigma of youth loneliness.

Sharing stories gives young people courage and confidence to cope.

Loneliness can feel overwhelming at times. Research shows that only about a third of young people (35%) feel confident talking about it. Young people say a fear of other people's reactions stops them sharing their experiences.

The Lonely Not Alone digital universe supports young people to share their stories and find comfort, courage, and inspiration to cope with their experience of loneliness.

Telling stories helps young people to connect and to realise that there are others who feel the same way. Whether it is a story of overcoming an aspect of loneliness or simply one of the struggles they face, sharing experiences can be a positive step. Sharing stories also influences and educates other young people and the wider public, where common mis-assumptions still prevail. For example that young people cause their own loneliness; young people are not really lonely; it only happens to elderly people; or it is just a state of mind.

A campaign by young people, for young people

We believe young people are the experts in tackling issues that affect them. Over the past three and a half years, in partnership with creative co-design agency, Effervescent, we've worked with around 100 young people, supporting them as volunteers and as commissioned creatives to use their own lived experiences of loneliness to help themselves and their peers.

Thousands of people have got involved: in 2021, research showed 3.1 million young people in the UK had seen Lonely Not Alone, and 70% said they felt less alone as a result.

**Thank you for hosting a digital storytelling session to help young people share their stories in the Lonely Not Alone universe.
This one small step could be a giant leap for young people who are lonely.**

Nick Crofts, Co-op Foundation CEO



One Small Step 2022

The universe goes on forever Loneliness doesn't have to

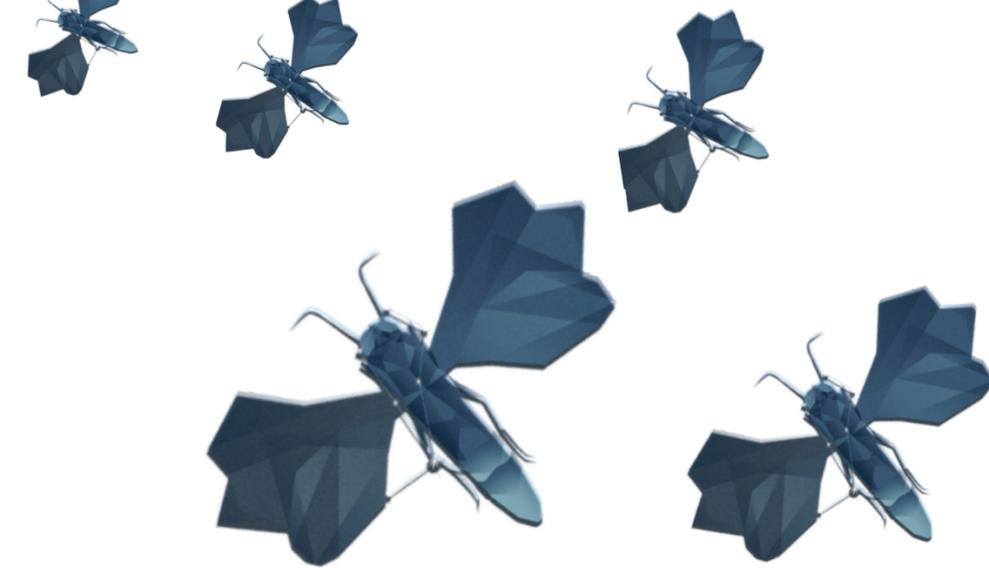
We're inviting young people into a digital universe filled with authentic stories from young people who have experienced loneliness, and perhaps discovered the One Small Step that has helped to make things better for them.

When a young person anonymously shares their story on the website, they become a star in the night sky, and part of a constellation of other stars who have similar experiences of loneliness. The universe is home to 10 constellations. The Hedgehog constellation is full of people who are hurting, but don't let anyone get near enough to help. Urban Foxes have been moved from place to place and feel like outsiders. The Unicorn constellation is made up of talented people who just don't seem to fit in with those around them.

Please visit www.lonelynotalone.org for more information about how we safeguard the wellbeing of everyone who submits a story, and protect their personal details.

Each Lonely Not Alone constellation has been mapped to a real constellation, so young people can look up at the night sky from their bedroom window or back garden and see their star up there, shining bright.

In our universe the constellation known as Pegasus is made up of trailblazing Unicorns, whilst Perseus is reimagined as the brave Polar Bears. You might like to take your young people outside to do a spot of stargazing!



You can find further advice and resources at the Tackling Youth Loneliness website which is created by the National Youth Partnership

tacklingyouthloneliness.org.uk



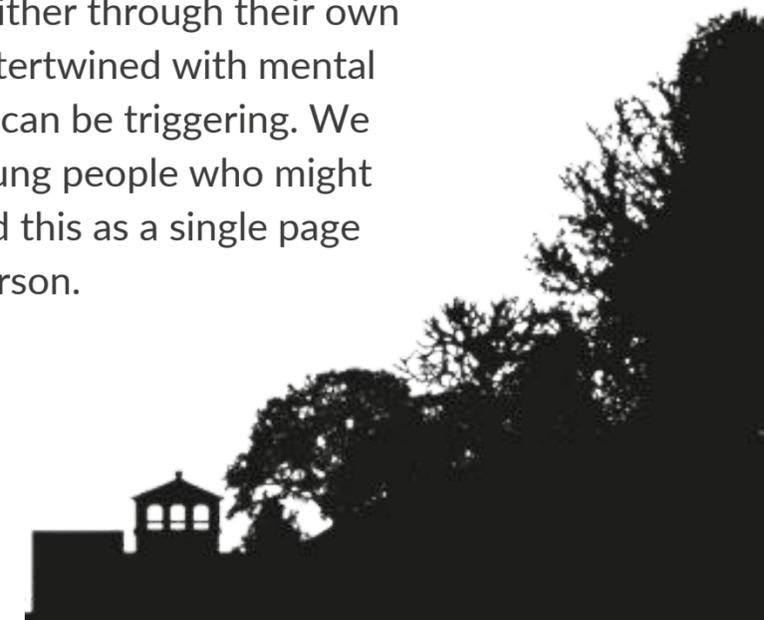
Who this pack is for

This pack is for youth workers, youth leaders, creative arts leaders and teachers who want to support young people to talk about loneliness together, to tell their stories, and to share them with others – especially those who don't belong to a youth group, or who might be more comfortable telling their story in an anonymous digital universe.

As a session leader you should have a thorough understanding of the causes and consequences of young people's loneliness before you support young people to share their stories.

This pack is a guide – you can adapt it to suit the young people in your session, your own expertise and the space and session length you're working within. What's crucial, though, is to create a safe space where young people engage because they want to, and to ensure you have strategies in place afterwards for anyone who needs more time to talk.

For any discussion with young people about loneliness and isolation, workers should know what support is available to young people, either through their own organisations or from specialist provision. Loneliness is intertwined with mental wellbeing, and discussion around such a sensitive subject can be triggering. We have included in the appendices a list of resources for young people who might need specialist support after the session – we've designed this as a single page document that can be copied and given to each young person.





The right space

We suggest:

- A space where young people feel safe and respected
- Neutrally decorated (without posters or graffiti on the wall) to aid focus
- Movable comfortable seating, such as cushions and bean bags
- A room that is unlikely to have on-lookers, casual droppers-in, people listening in or peeking through the window
- If possible, set up a 'time out' space slightly apart and slightly out of eye-line for anyone opting to take a moment (nobody wants to be looked at when they are feeling anxious, but be sure safeguarding procedures are still in place and they don't end up isolated.) We often create this space together with the young people and some sheer bits of fabric, fairy lights, and a sofa or some beanbags



How to prepare

Resources you should prepare

We suggest you prepare a copy of the resource sheet from the appendix, in a yellow envelope and tied together with some string, wool or ribbon.

You'll also need

- A small notebook for each participant, OR some good quality paper
- Wool/staples/craft supplies to make into a tiny notebook in the session
- Pens and pencils for the group to share
- Crayons, coloured pencils, or oil pastels
- Wifi for young people to use their own devices to access the Lonely Not Alone website OR **wifi connected devices** if young people don't have their own device
- Flipchart paper and blue tack or masking tape

Young people can visit the URL below to submit their story. They'll be asked to give their age and an **email address, so we** can send them a welcome message and resources for more support. No other information will be requested. If you'd like more information about how we keep young people safe, please visit <https://lonelynotalone.org/privacy-notice>

lonelynotalone.org

Who these sessions are for

The young people who will most benefit from the sessions

These sessions are for young people who have experienced loneliness and are ready to talk about that. You can reassure them that nobody will be put on the spot or asked to do anything they don't want to.

The sessions are not for young people who haven't experienced loneliness themselves - allies

Allies can be directed to the website to read the stories and to support the campaign by making a positive or empathetic comment. These messages appear in the universe alongside the constellation stories. Allies will also be given a digital badge they can share to social media to help other young people find the site and share their stories. They might also express the One Small Step they now know they can do, or intend to do, to be helpful to young people experiencing loneliness.

Development/learning objectives include:

- Feel less isolated in their experiences
- Develop positive trusting relationships with other people and offer support to them
- Believe they have someone they can talk to
- Create some poetry, prose or lyrics; record spoken words, or a capella song, on the Lonely Not Alone website – a form of social action that helps break down stigma
- Understand that sharing their story on the Lonely Not Alone website will support other young people across the country, who don't have a youth group to talk to

The aim of these sessions is to help young people realise that even if they are lonely, they're not alone, and that talking about loneliness can be a big relief and the start of a way forward.

If you need some help or advice

If you need general youth work advice or safeguarding advice for these sessions, you can contact your local authority (while not all have youth services, they will be able to give advice and support). You can also contact your local CVS - community, voluntary service. For safeguarding advice, you should contact your local safeguarding children's board.

If you are looking for creative support with these sessions, please contact Effeverscent - richard@eff.org.uk

Ready to Start?
These sessions can be delivered either as a one-session experience, or a two-session experience.





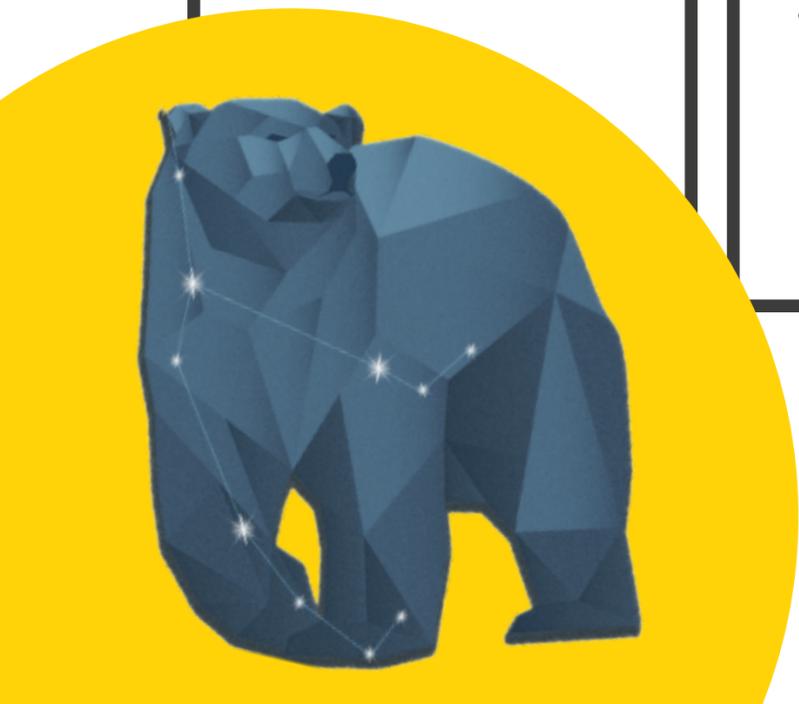
**single session
workshop
plan**

Single session workshop plan: 2.5 hours

This session is designed for 7 – 15 people.

Not all activities will fit into the timings; you can choose which you prefer and there are some extras if you feel the chemistry of the group needs more than one activity in each section. All session support workers should join in with every activity and be 'with' the group - rather than an adult supervising the group.

Timings	Activities	Resources	Notes
Introduction 5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remind everyone about the purpose of the session, and the topic being explored• Reassure everyone that loneliness is something that everyone here has experienced, and that everyone has come to talk about it, even if that might feel tough at first• Outline the session – what we will be doing and in what order (in general terms, but if anyone in your group is neurodiverse, they may appreciate seeing the plan written/drawn on the wall on post it notes, for example)		





Timings

Activities

Resources

Notes

Warm up
10 minutes

- Love + Hate. Ask someone to say their name, say something they absolutely adore and something they can't stand. Write down what they say on a flipchart. At the end, attach the flipchart paper to the wall.
- Name + Action. Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Invite the first person to say their name and do a movement. Everyone in the circle says their name back to them, and copies their movement. Go around the circle: the person who went first can decide whether clockwise or anticlockwise.
- Fruit Salad. Invite everyone to sit on a chair in a circle. One person stands in the centre. The person standing makes a statement that's true for them (I'm wearing clean socks, my parents drive me crazy, I hide it but I'm really shy) and then anyone for whom that statement is also true, has to swap chairs whilst the person standing tries to sit. The person in the centre then has their turn. If the person in the centre can't think of a statement they can say Fruit Salad and everyone has to swap chairs. Give up when you think everyone is warmed up. Get rid of the chairs and sit in a circle on cushions/floor.

Flipchart paper + pens

The ice breakers are to help the group find out something about each other, and to immediately feel supported, listened to, like their presence is important.

Choose one, two, or all three depending on how you feel the group is jelling

The love and hate game gets everyone speaking on their territory/expertise. It also creates some links as people realise they have shared passions or horrors (spiders, baked beans, little sisters, fluffy animals...)

The name and action game helps spontaneity, creates group trust that everyone will back them up, and gets everyone saying something early on in the session.

Fruit salad encourages spontaneity, mischief, and gets people used to sharing embarrassing truths without anyone dwelling on it, and immediately seeing other people might be/feel the same.

Promises
15 minutes

- Remind everyone **again** about the subject matter, and then split them into small groups of 2 - 4 people (depends on group size - you want 2 - 4 little groups in total)
- Ask each mini-group, "what promises do you think we need to make to each other, to ensure this group stays a safe place for everyone to talk about loneliness, and their experiences?"
- Bring the groups together again in a circle after about 5 minutes or whenever you judge everyone is ready. Ask each group to offer a promise (one at a time) and then, when they've expressed it, ask the whole group if they can promise to do/be that. If yes, write it down. If not, negotiate until everyone feels ok, then write it down.
- Continue this process until every statement that's needed is on the flipchart. Some statements might need editing as you go.
- At the end, stick the flipchart to the wall.

Flipchart + pens

The use of the word "promises" here is deliberate, and pulls on neurolinguistic programming. You want everyone to agree how they **will** behave, rather than what they **won't** do. If ideas are expressed as, 'no doing this or that' ask the group to suggest a positive way to express that, they everyone can get behind. This is because, if you introduce things that people mustn't do, that idea is now present in the group. If you stick to and write down things people "will" do, that positive message stays attached to the flipchart and continues to influence the subconsciously group throughout the session.



Timings

Starting the Conversation

15 minutes

Activities

- Blue tack the 'memes' and images from the resources section, on the walls.
- Ask everyone to walk around the room and look at all these images and quotes and memes. Ask everyone to choose one that speaks to them or they find interesting, and bring it back to the circle.
- Invite everyone to sit in a circle on cushions.
- Ask the first person to introduce the image they chose, and what it was that they find so truthful, interesting, startling, or relevant about that image.
- Whoever started by introducing their image gets to say whether they're passing it clockwise or anticlockwise around the circle. Everyone should have the opportunity to speak, including the session leaders, which should speak about their own experiences with thoughtfulness about what and how much to share to benefit the group.
- Make notes about what everyone says on the flipchart paper, and add the flipchart paper to the wall at the end of this exercise, with the images and quotes around it.

Resources

Appendix 3

Flipchart and pens

Blue tack

Notes

Notes on taking notes: in order to create an environment (or milieu) of safety, attentiveness and openness, it's very important to attempt to write down what young people say verbatim. By that, it doesn't mean you have to capture every single word, but you should try to capture as much as possible, and in their own words. It's not helpful to translate this – the most helpful thing is to write what young people say exactly as they say it.

"LNA has given me the hope of doing something positive, meeting new people who I immediately felt a connection with, and creating something incredible. It's the first piece of excitement and happiness in a long while, and I found myself so inspired by everyone and everything we were doing. "

Josie, 20



Timings

Exploration
30 minutes

Activities

- In a safe and supportive manner ask the group if they are comfortable sharing their experiences of being lonely – offer that we can either discuss, or we could do a creative activity to help everyone get there, but the group has to decide. Get the group to decide.
- If they want to chat in a group, just let that happen and nurture it. OR
- Introduce the idea of maps. Maps show routes for journeys, how to get from one place to another. Some maps are very clear, and some are ore maps of territories and terrains and you have to find your own way through. It might not always be obvious where you are going.
- Now we're going to map our own journeys of loneliness in our books or on flipchart paper or snazzy paper. You can do it however you want - as a map of a real or imaginary, as a flow diagram, as a timeline, however you like. It can be as real-life or as magical as you like. Give everyone plenty of time, and we often find background music helps people feel more comfortable.
- Ask someone to introduce what they've drawn, and what it means to them. Ask them to pass their map around the circle, and everyone to say what is it in this image that seems really truthful, or strikes a chord for them, or they can relate to (you are *not* asking them to critique the image or judge the quality – if anyone goes down that path, gently remind them we're looking at the metaphor as the important thing)
- When the book gets around to the starting person, they get to say a final thing about how everyone reacted to their image. Then move on to the next person in the circle and start the process again. If you unsure if everyone wants to share, you could – instead – ask for someone to offer to share theirs next, but you must ensure everyone comments on whatever is shared.
- Capture all the commentary on flip charts and stick them to the wall.

Resources

Maps in appendices, and on the online resource

Flip charts

Pens

Snazzy paper

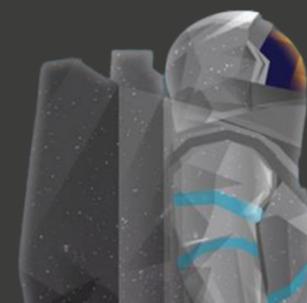
Crayons and oil pastels

Craft supplies

Notes

Background music. So, as with the idea of a neutral space with no posters on the wall, music for crafting or drawing our experiences should be non-lyrics based, and preferably reasonably unfamiliar to the group. You're using it to create a safe space and a mood, and to ensure the silence whilst people draw isn't awkward.

Creative activity: this is probably obvious but all the sessional workers should join in this activity and draw their experiences. You're trying to avoid them and us situations.



"When we were brainstorming often our ideas went down a path I had never even considered, but they turned out to be really important ideas and often resonated with a lot of our experiences of loneliness within the group."



Timings

Wind down
15 minutes

Activities

- Circle time again: remind everyone we have come to the end of this session, but that Lonely Not Alone is an ongoing project. Once they have submitted their story they will be invited to join a constellation of other young people in the night sky. They can go back to read other stories, and the constellation they join is really visible in the night sky so they will be able to see themselves as stars in the real universe once they have their star name.
- Ask everyone around the circle to talk about one thing that's been really good for them over the two sessions, and one small step they're going to take for themselves and their wellbeing in the week ahead – whether to do with loneliness, or something else.
- Remind everyone that if they need any support or extra talking time, what's available from your setting, and that they also have resources on the paper you gave them.

Resources

Notes



Feeding back

We would love to hear your feedback on how this session has gone - best bits, bits that were tricky, bits that you found surprising. Please send an email to Eloïse Malone: ellie@eff.org.uk



Writing Credit

Written by Eloïse Malone,
Effervescent, 2021/22

 **effervescent**

Lonely Not Alone: Helpful Resources



You might be
lonely, but you're
not alone

Action for Kids

For disabled children and young people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

AnxietyUK

Support for people suffer with anxiety through online resources and a helpline.

Barnardo's

Offer support for young carers including activities, counselling, and emotional support.

Become

Working to improve the everyday lives and future life chances of children in care and young care leavers.

The Carers Trust

Provides activities, support and help for children and young people who care for a parent or sibling.

Childline

Provides support (through phone and online) to children struggling with a range of issues including bullying, abuse, safety, the law, you and your body, your feelings, friends, relationships, sex, home and families, education and work.

Children Heard and Seen

Support children and young people whose parents are in prison.

Each Education

Supports people experiencing homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying.

Gingerbread

Gives support and advice to young parents.

Hope

Supports young people aged 11 to 25 when a close family member is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.

Littletroopers

Supporting all children with one or both parents serving in the British Armed Forces, regular or reserve.

MenCap

Supporting people with a learning disability, and their families and carers.

The Mix

A support service for young people, helping with many issues - from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, from break-ups to drugs.

National Bullying Helpline

Information and advice on bullying.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Refuge for women and children against domestic abuse.

NSPCC

Supports people who experience or who are affected by child abuse and sexual abuse.

The Princes Trust

Help with getting a job, starting your own business, or making a fresh start in life.

The Proud Trust

Supports LGBT+ young people.

Rise

Supports people affected by domestic abuse and violence.

Runaway Helpline

Supports people who are thinking about running away, who have already run away, or if they have been away and come back.

Shelter

Support and advice for people experiencing issues with housing.

The Refugee Council

Provides support and services to young refugees.

Traveller Movement

Supports ethnic Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma and other members of the traveller community.

Victim Support

Support children and young people who have been affected by crime.

Winston's Wish

Provides emotional and practical bereavement support to children and young people.

Young Farmers

Support and activities for young people who live rurally.

Young Minds

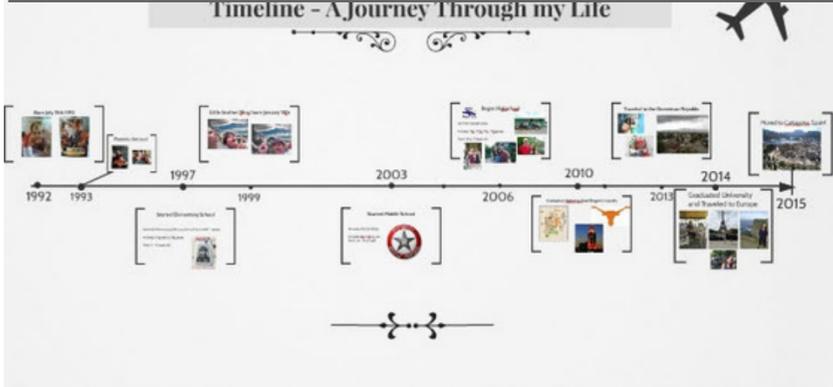
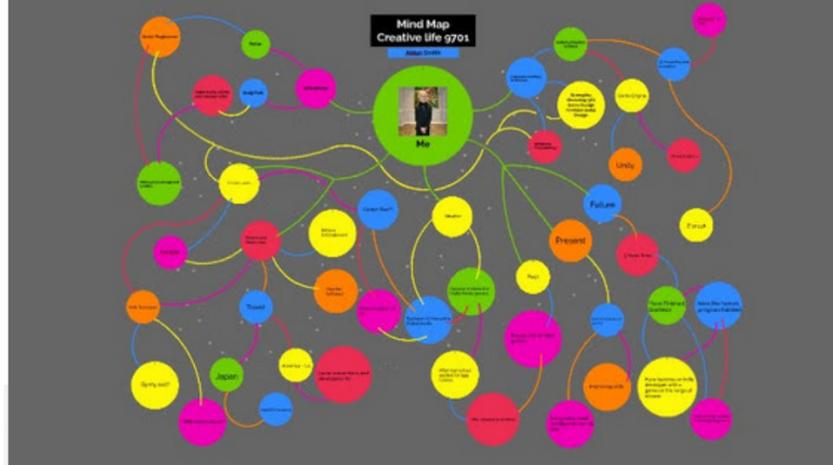
Whether you want to understand more about how you're feeling and find ways to feel better, or you want to support someone who's struggling, Young Minds can help.

Youth Employment

Support for unemployed young people.

Appendix 2: Maps and Journeys

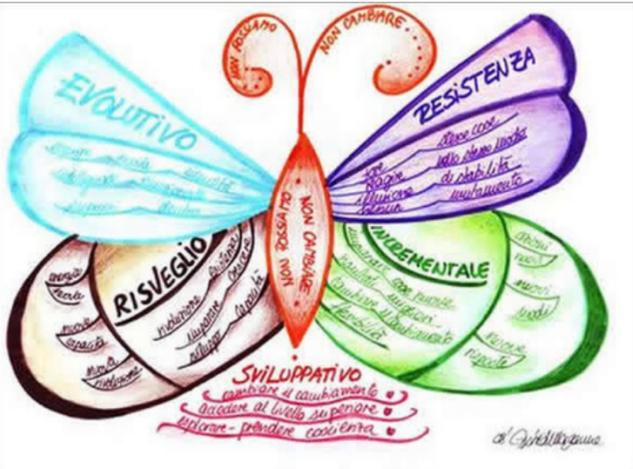
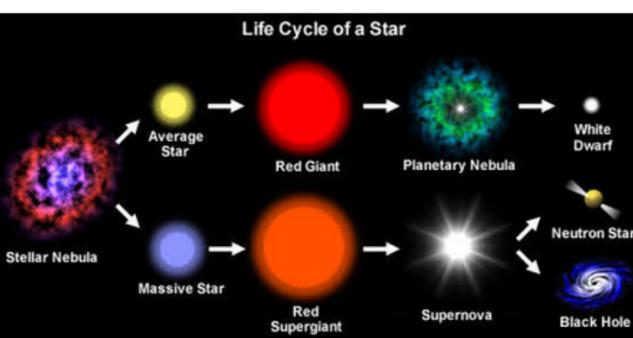
[CLICK HERE](#)



Use this QR code to download these images for print-size quality

Appendix 3: Memes, quotes and images about loneliness

[CLICK HERE](#)



It's important to **catch the loneliness** before it **becomes second nature**

no matter how faraway you are
from me
when we look up
into the clear night sky
we will always see the same moon

SOMETIMES THE PERSON WHO TRIES TO KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY IS THE MOST LONELY PERSON

Don't chase people.
Be yourself, do your own thing and work hard. The right people, the ones who really belong in your life, will come to you and stay.

8
"Loneliness exists because you want to grab something from outside. Do not try to run away from loneliness. It is a blessing in disguise."
- Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

People think being alone makes you lonely, but I don't think that's true. Being surrounded by the wrong people is the loneliest thing in the world.
Kim Culbertson



Over time, loneliness gets inside you and doesn't go away.
Carlos Ruiz Zafón

www.lonelynotalone.org

