

lonely **NOT** **ALONE**

One Small Step **"Fireside Chat "** Story-Sharing Session Plan 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.



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 comfort, courage, and inspiration to cope with their experiences of loneliness.

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 (Co-op Foundation, 2022).

That's why young people created the Lonely Not Alone universe.

Hearing each other's stories helps young people to connect and realise that others feel the same way. Whether it's a story of overcoming loneliness entirely, or just one part of the experience, sharing stories can be a positive step. Sharing stories also highlights where common misconceptions still prevail - for example, that loneliness is caused by our own actions; 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. Since 2019, in partnership with creative co-design agency, Effervescent, we've worked with around 120 young people, supporting them as volunteers and as commissioned creatives to use their lived experiences of loneliness to help themselves and their peers. This "fireside chats" workshop plan was prototyped and developed by a group of 12 young people in 2022.

Thousands of people have got involved over the years: 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 storytelling session to help young people share their stories.

This one small step could be a giant leap for young people who are lonely.

Nick Crofts, Co-op Foundation CEO



One Small Step

The universe goes on forever Loneliness doesn't have to

In 2022 and 2023, we invited you into a digital universe filled with authentic stories from young people who had experienced loneliness, and perhaps discovered the One Small Step that helped to make things better for them.

Each time a young person anonymously shared their story on the website, they became a star in the night sky, and part of a constellation of other stars with 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.

www.lonelynotalone.org is no longer accepting new stories, but the archive is still there to be explored.

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.

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'll need

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, and wool/staples/craft supplies to make into a tiny notebook in the session
- 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
- A bunch of tealight or pillar candles or fairy lights, and a hat or bowl



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

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 or prose about the experience of loneliness
- Give voice to each other's stories, and offer some comfort, reassurance, or advice to each other

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 Creative Director Bella Day: www.belladay.co.uk



Ready to Start?





**workshop
plan**

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 to go 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.
- Get rid of the chairs and sit in a circle on cushions/floor.

Flipchart paper + pens

The icebreakers are to help the group find out something about each other and for the young people to immediately feel supported and listened to. You want them to feel like their presence is important.

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

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 difficult 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 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. It draws on Neuro Linguistic Programming theories. 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 it, so everyone can get behind it. If you introduce things that people mustn't do, that thing that's not allowed is now present in the group. If you stick to and write down things people "will" do, that positive message stays dominant, and continues to subconsciously influence the 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.
- 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

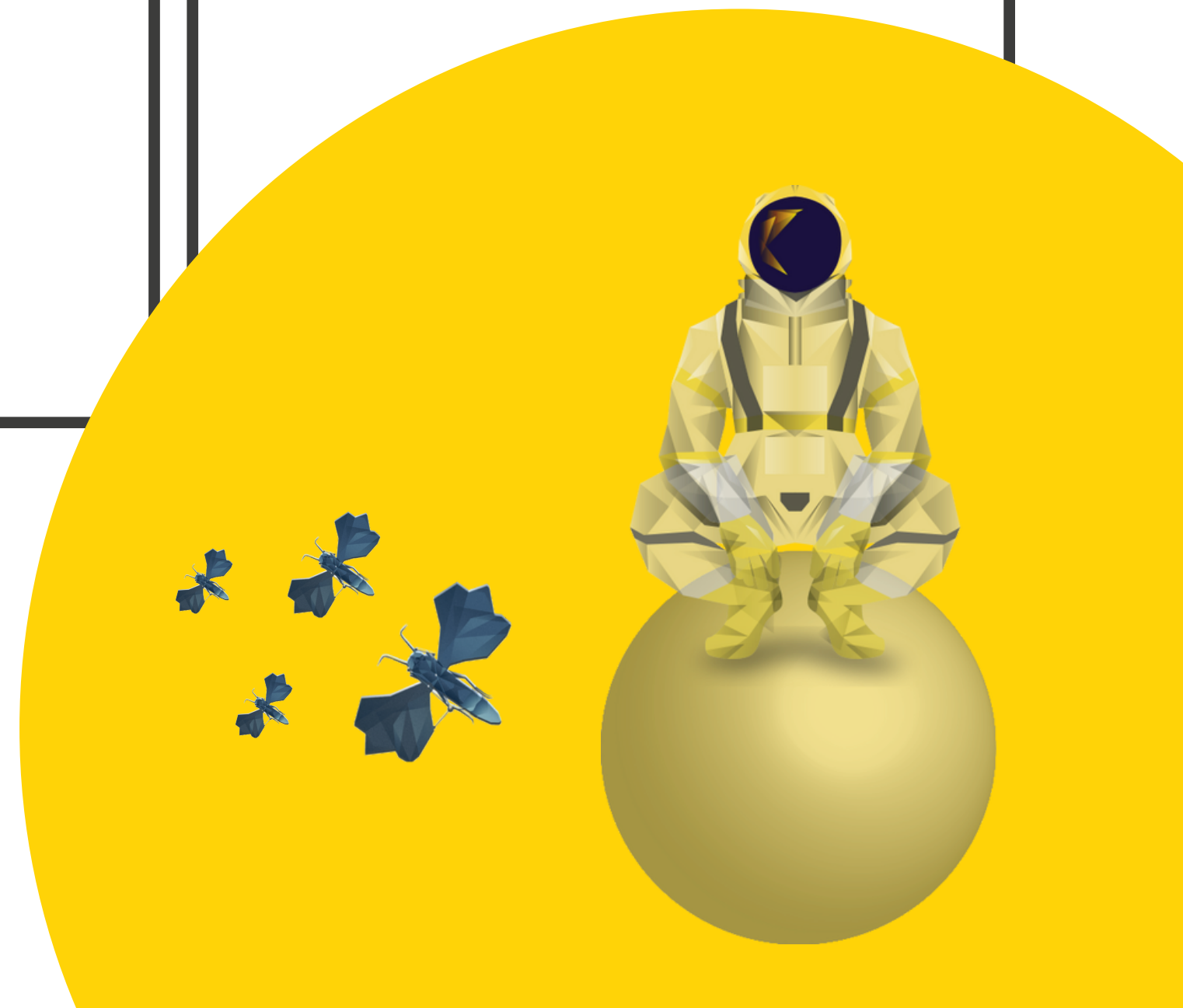
Blue tack

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

- Share the link to the website with everyone. It's a good idea to give a quick demonstration of how to get into the website, how to access all the constellations, and how to click through each constellation to find the stories.
- Ask everyone to find a safe comfortable space in the room, and spend some time - maybe ten or fifteen minutes - exploring the website and finding a story that really resonates for them. Maybe it's a story that explores an aspect of loneliness that's new for them, or is very familiar. Maybe it's a story which includes One Small Step that is rarely discussed. Maybe it's a story which they respond to very emotionally.
- Ask everyone to return to the circle with their chosen story on their device.
- Ask each person to take turns reading out the story. When each person has read their story, ask everyone in the circle to express a response - which could be how it feels to hear that, a bit of advice they would like to give the original storyteller, or any other personal response.
- At the end of this section, ask whether anyone has any thoughts overall about what they have heard - and capture these on the flipchart paper.

Resources

Flip charts

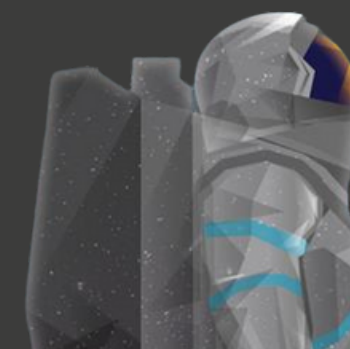
Pens

Craft supplies

Digital Devices, wifi-enabled

Notes

Background music. 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 research doesn't feel awkward.



"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."

Helen , 2021



Timings

Wind down
15 minutes

Activities

- Circle time again: remind everyone we have come to the end of this session, but that the Lonely Not Alone universe goes on. They can go back to read other stories, and the constellation they most identify with is really visible in the night sky, so they can look up and see the stars there, knowing other young people are looking up all over the world.
- Ask everyone around the circle to talk about one thing that's been really good for them, 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 of the support that is available from your setting for anyone who might need some extra talking time. You can also remind them that there is a list of resources on the paper you gave them

Resources

Notes

If you have some campfire-style food - hot dogs or marshmallows, perhaps - this is a good time to share it around.



Feeding back

We would love to hear your feedback on how this session has gone - the best bits, any bits that were tricky, or bits that you found surprising.

Please email Bella Day:
eloise.bella.day@gmail.com



Writing Credit

Written by Bella Day,
Effervescent, 2021 - 2023

 **effervescent**


Foundation

 **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: Memes, quotes and images about loneliness

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

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

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

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.

Loneliness is proof that your innate search for connection is intact.

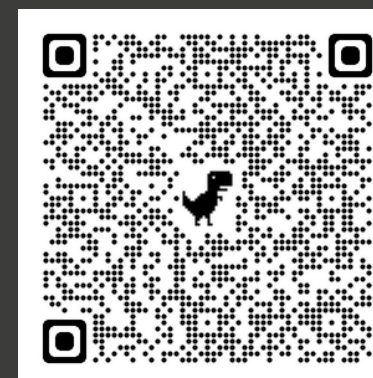
SOMETIMES THE PERSON WHO TRIES TO KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY IS THE MOST LONELY PERSON

“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

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

Carlos Ruiz Zafón



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

www.lonelynotalone.org

