

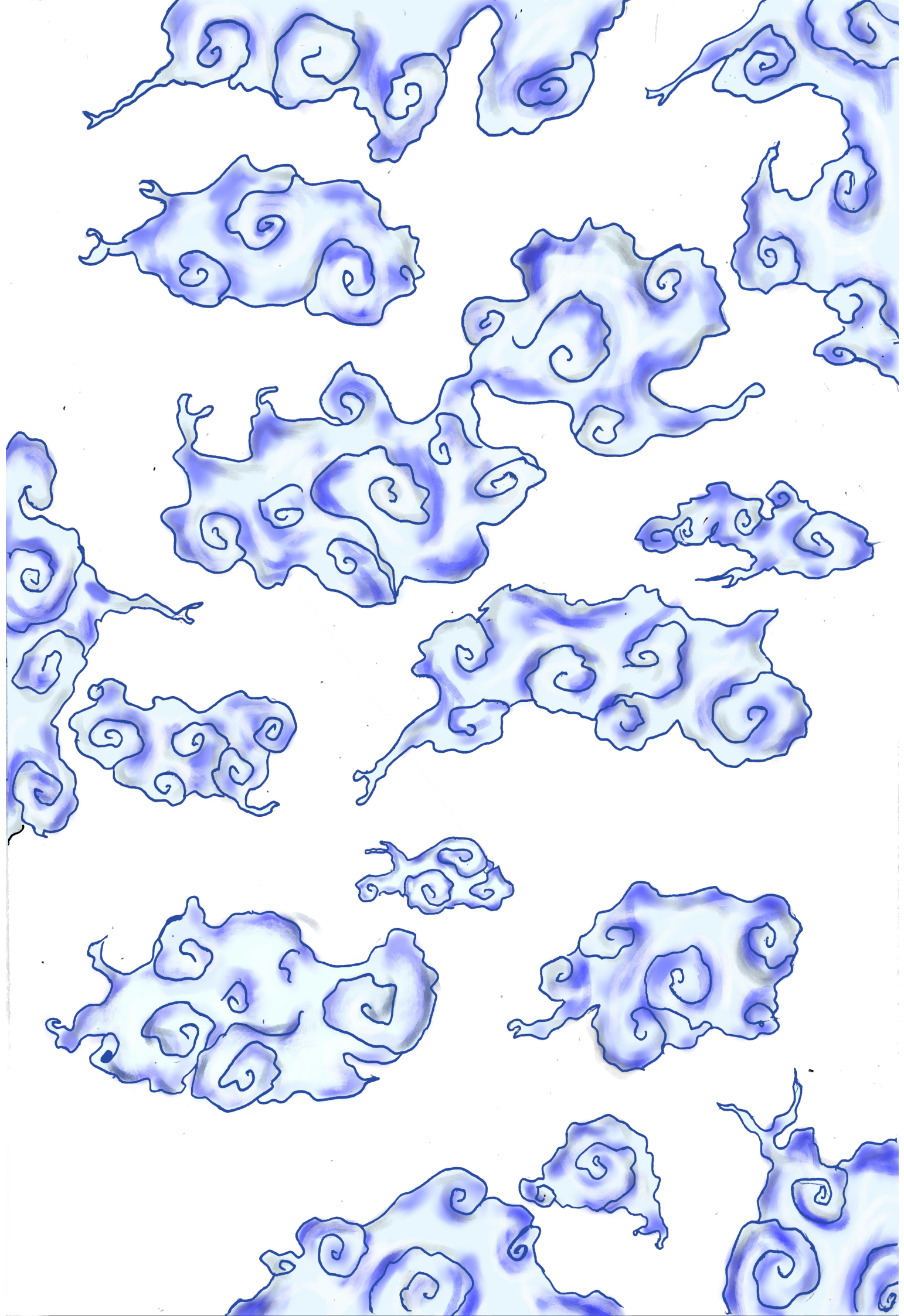


## **AS ONE... NOT ALONE.**

Tackling youth loneliness through youth work and healthy relationships.

**UK YOUTH**

**UKY** | VOICE



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\*\*Throughout this document, there will be references to mental health conditions, gender identity and sensitive topics. As a youth worker, please make sure you have read this document through thoroughly and where necessary sought other advice and support before discussing the experience and effects of loneliness with young people. If during any of the activities suggested in this guide, you have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of the young people in your care, please follow your organisations safeguarding procedures. At the end of this document, we have provided a list of trusted organisations that you can signpost young people to or use to learn more about youth loneliness. \*\*

## This project is funded by FASTN

"FASTN believes that everyone should have the same opportunities to form a stable family life. We work in partnership to promote healthy, dependable relationships that support children, young people and family - in all its forms - to thrive. We champion the development of relationship skills in childhood that sustain positive relationships for life. We want to build an inclusive, committed and compassionate future for everyone. We do this by connecting people and inspiring new relationships.

fastn

# Introduction

This project is the product of a collaborative effort by a group of young people in the UK Youth Movement. We wanted to make a guide for youth workers that would help them to understand loneliness from the perspective of young people with lived experience of the issue. We wanted to produce a guide for youth workers to help them work with young people who are experiencing loneliness, to explore what it means and how it can be overcome by building the kind of positive and dependable relationships that support us through difficult times.

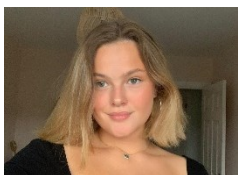
Our hope is that as many youth workers as possible can see this so as many young people as possible can benefit from it.

We spent a lot of time as a team discussing the definition of 'loneliness', as it is a multi-faceted and broad issue that can be experienced in lots of different ways. We all felt that loneliness and being alone are distinctly different as young people can still be lonely whilst surrounded by people. If someone lacks meaningful, healthy and dependable relationships, whether familial, platonic, or romantic, they may feel isolated and lonely.

We have used poetry and pictures throughout this resource to explore how loneliness makes us and other young people feel and shared some personal stories of how healthy relationships and a sense of community through volunteering have helped to overcome feelings of loneliness. Lastly, this guide also includes some activities designed to bring young people from all walks of life together to build practical tools and to understand how building healthy and dependable relationships can be key to tackling loneliness.



# Meet the creators



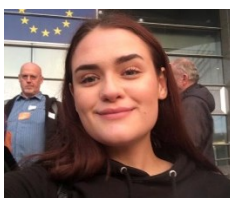
I'm Anais, I'm 18 years old and I found out about this fantastic project through the Staffordshire Youth Union, where I'm a youth representative. In September, I'll be starting my degree in politics at the Uni' of Leeds, with a view to spending my life furthering the cause of social justice.



Hi, my name is Kerrie. I'm 20 and I'm a member of UK Youth Voice. I'm from the north west and I love to help others within my community. With my own personal experience with loneliness I am passionate to support young people and help them know we are here.



Hi! I'm Millie, and I'm a member of UK Youth Voice. I'm 19, I study physics in Birmingham, and I love knitting and my (many) houseplants. I've really enjoyed working on this resource, especially exploring how creativity can help mend connections and relationships, while working with some other amazing young people.



Hi, my name is Millie, I'm 17 and a member of Youth Parliament. I'm also a member for Staffordshire Youth Union, and I'm the founder of Staffordshire Youth Strike for Climate. I am currently doing my A levels in history and sociology, and English literature. In my spare time I also run a small business, and I have a YouTube Channel.



Hi, I'm Natalie, and I am a member of UK Youth Voice. I'm 19 and I study politics, philosophy and economics with The Open University. I'm the mother of two cats and one day I would like to work in parliament. I also in my spare time do voluntary work within youth organisations ensuring young people always have a say on decisions that affect them and I love every second empowering young people in making a brighter future.



Hi! I'm Xavier, and I'm a member of UK Youth Voice. Currently I'm unemployed but I don't let that stop me in my passion for supporting my community. My passion is to provide better mental health services for young people and put an end to child poverty. I believe youth having a say in this is vital as there needs to be better services across the UK to support young people and their wellbeing.

You'll notice poems scattered throughout this resource; all these words are those of young people.

Poetry is a powerful tool for showing how you feel, and when conversations get difficult to have, poetry and creativity can help you release those stresses. In this resource we gathered poems written by young people from The UK Youth Movement as an encouragement and reminder that taking breaks in which to be creative is good for you

Next time you or the young people you work with are not feeling so great, remember to take a break and pick up a pen. You never know where it may take you...'

## The Night Is Quiet

The night is quiet, now  
The beauty of the night is stirring, now; A  
harmonious breeze ripples through the fresh  
midnight air.  
The stars glide through the sky, In an eternal,  
heavenlywaltz.  
With the moon, like a memory that wells a  
tear in the corner of your eye;  
A tear that falls as gentle rain of nightly chill  
teasing the leaves, of a lonely tree, sat upon  
a hill.  
The symphony of the night is swelling, now,  
The wind whistles through the gaps in  
the leaves, the clouds, the trees,  
As the moon conducts the eternal dance of  
elated starlight,  
So, it seems, the tapping of the rain, On the  
lonely tree –  
an awestruck clapping,

For the beauty of the night yet; there is no  
light to see, For adoration by the stars, Nor  
glance given,  
By the moon's blissful shine,  
There is no spoken word from the whisper of  
the quiet breeze,  
There is no ear for the sound of gentle rain  
tapping on the leaves.

Watch the stars dance across the sky but  
never stop above the tree,  
See the moon's light shine everywhere but the  
surface of the leaves,

Hear the gentle whistle through the clouds,  
the grass, the trees.

Give no regard for the sound of the rain upon  
the leaves.

The night is quiet, now the wind subsides  
to a comforting whisper;

the stars slow and glisten, like eyes; The glow  
of the moon,  
smiles, a warm contented smile,  
The beauty of the Night is fading, now.

Darkened clouds accrue,  
and the wind travels to sing elsewhere, The  
glistening stars move to dance and light up a  
different part of the sky, The smile of the  
moon,  
Subsides to bring a tear to someone else's  
eye; Still, the gentle rain,  
taps the leaves, of the lonely tree,  
lain upon the hill.

The night is lonely, now;

its beauty, moved, away,  
Yet, there is a golden memory, of a time  
when it seemed  
like the Night was here to stay.

**- Joesph Ward, Member of Youth  
Parliament**

We went on the UK Youth Voice Instagram account to hear from other young people what they thought about loneliness among young people, the signs, causes and if this experience was something they could relate to.

## Have you ever experienced loneliness?

What are the signs and indications someone could be lonely?

When they r NEVER excited, when they ALWAYS leave early, when they ONLY listen

Reply



People who are frequently disconnected from others in school

Reply



Low mood

Reply

What do you think is a cause of loneliness?

Feeling isolated

Reply

Lack of communication, understanding, and acceptance of differences

Reply

Low self esteem

Reply

Lack of specific connection with individuals / lack of contact with connected individ.

Reply

Felling like your a burden on people even when your not

Reply

Have you ever experienced loneliness?

72

18

votes for yes

0

votes for no

As you can see 72 people viewed this but only 18 responded. There could be many reasons that the other 54 didn't interact with this question. Maybe they don't want to admit they sometimes feel lonely?

# Personal stories of tackling loneliness

Here are two personal stories of how finding a place in community and developing healthy personal relationships have helped young people experiencing loneliness. You could use these when working with young people to explore any similarities and differences in their own experiences.

## Personal Story:

Growing up, I struggled with my gender identity and sexuality, leading me to develop mental health problems and feel isolated from my peers. It can be easy to seek a sense of belonging and validation through unhealthy coping mechanisms, and for a period of time, that is exactly what I did. It took me years to overcome my reliance on self-destructive tendencies as a form of distraction. I lacked purpose and motivation, until I ended up falling down a rabbit hole of volunteering. For the last 4 years, I've been heavily involved with local politics, especially in regard to young people and ensuring their voices are heard. I felt it was crucial to represent young people, like me, who were vulnerable. I blossomed from someone who struggled to order at a restaurant, to someone engaging in public speaking and debate. Offering my skills to people who genuinely valued them aided me overcome my issues with self confidence and develop ambitions. As for feeling isolated, engaging in my local community brought me together with many motivated, passionate, and inspirational young people, many of which had their own issues as well. My community began to feel like a family to me and for once in my life, I felt valuable, I genuinely felt as if I was capable of making the world better, even if that was just on a community level.

- Anonymous, aged 17

## Personal Story:

A few years ago I was isolated and lonely for a long time. I didn't admit it and no one saw as I put up a front. I had negative people and relationships all around me I just didn't know it at the time. Since letting one person in and finally admitting I was lonely my life has changed drastically. I have positive relationships around me then I ever have. I finally know the difference in positive and negative but overall I am not scared of letting the bad relations go even if they are family. Just because someone has been in your life for a long time doesn't make it okay, Family can be a negative relationship don't let it cloud your choices.

- Anonymous aged 20

These experiences show how having healthy and dependable interpersonal relationships as well as roles within a community can provide young people with a sense of purpose, belonging and value and be an effective tool for tackling youth loneliness.

Young people who feel isolated and uncertain of their future can benefit from giving and, in turn, receiving from their community. Bridging the gap between isolated social groups, such as vulnerable young people and the elderly, can offer a world of opportunities and provide young people with the social skills they may be lacking. Overall, encouraging and fueling sustainable, long-term community projects and relations helps form a cohesive and united community, in addition to providing young people with the experience of mutually beneficial and purposeful relationships.



Connections and relationships with others are so important for our wellbeing...

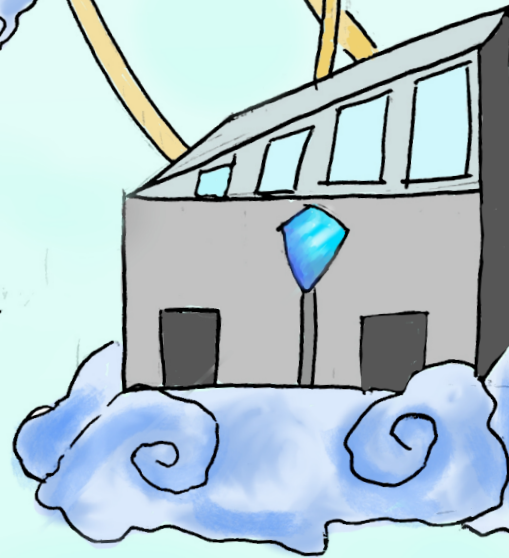
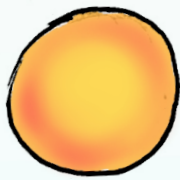
...But sometimes connections can

break...

...leaving us feeling untethered and alone...

...but we can repair, maintain and reform connections with a little time and effort.

No one should be alone,  
So let's all reach out and come together!



**I start by telling myself it's okay to feel this way, then i take time to treat myself and bring my confidence up.**

**I surround myself with positive energy and things that make me feel safe and comforted.**

**I try going to local groups that i am intrested in.**

**When i start to feel lonely i like to set myself a challenge. Just somthing small to start with.**

**Ringing my mum or cousins, to eating pizza and watching tv with friends.**

**Getting into the community through volunteering. I volunteer with girguiding, that has allowed new relationships with people.**



# Four Walls – Poem

These walls are shrinking  
With our bodies  
Getting smaller every day  
We carry them around in back pockets  
To transport us anywhere  
To escape these four walls we have found another  
We navigate the globe in cursor  
A language we all speak  
Share, retweet and sign petitions  
start revolutions from our kitchens  
and worldwide movements without moving  
From beds  
We lay on pillows like dunes and stretch our  
Shrinking bones into desert landscapes  
Love is no longer found in sweaty palms but with a swipe of fingertips  
Loneliness after 50 years has been lost in translation  
What is the definition of  
"Are you okay"  
Conversation seems too weighty on tongues  
How do you answer three words so heavy  
In 280 characters  
Fit all of me  
Into a profile pic  
At least these four walls blink with screens  
Like flashing eyes and recognise me  
They don't stare at me blankly

-Laura Zuwa, Young Person.

We have put 4 activities in this pack for you to use with young people. They are things we have done before with our youth groups and found helpful to think about our own emotional wellbeing, to connect with new people and to explore how to build healthy and dependable relationships. We have tried to COVID19-proof them for you so they can be done socially distanced or digitally as well.

## Activity 1: The Welfare Wall

### Ingredients:

1. Roll of paper or A3 paper and tape.
2. Colourful marker pens.
3. Sticky notes (multiple piles recommended).
4. Ruler.

### Preparation:

1. Roll out the roll (or paper stuck together with tape) to a sufficient length for the number of young people involved.
2. With a marker and ruler, draw lines across the paper to make it look like bricks on a wall.
3. Place a couple of sticky note piles in place with some pens for each participant.

**Note:** This is great for social distancing as every young person can have their own space and it can be stretched out for however many participants you need it for, depending on space. It's also a great way once completely to decorate your hub with positivity.

### Step-by-step:

1. The first bit is for all the young people to write down problems they're experiencing affecting their wellbeing with each one in a different square. (5 minutes)
2. Once as many bricks have been filled, any empty bricks need to be filled with drawings of object, places and people that make us happy. (5 minutes).
3. Thirdly, with bricks with the problems the task is to find solutions and write those on the sticky notes and put them on other young people's bricks. Once all the bricks are colourful with solutions, the wall is complete

**Goal:** The point of this activity is about turning negative situations into positive and finding the good in the bad. It also encourages the young people to share problems in a safe space with people they can trust and find help in others. To complete the wall everyone has to work together to find positive solutions.

# Activity 2: Self-Care Kit Building

## Ingredients:

1. Cardboard box (shoe box, filing box, storage box etc).
2. Plain and colourful A4 paper.
3. Glue sticks (multiple recommended for each participant).
4. Colourful marker pens.

## Preparation:

1. Give out cardboard boxes for each participant.
2. Give out things to decorate the boxes

**Note:** You could send young people the things they need to do this from home and the activity could be done digitally

## Step-by-step:

1. With the colourful pens, paper and the glue, design the boxes with drawings of personal meanings (e.g. favourite food, quotes, places etc).
2. The next task is to get each participant to write a checklist of objects (e.g. favourite foods, films, magazines etc) that make them happy.
3. This checklist is for all the objects once each participant returns home to gather and store inside this box and use as a kit. This kit will be then used whenever the young person feels they need some self-care.
4. Ask each participant to write down some people who make them happy and how they could reach out to them when the participant is feeling lonely. They could also write down somethings they could do together like going for a walk, , having dinner together over a video call, sending them a show they can watch together and discuss

**Goal:** The goal of this activity is to not only get young people to think about their own self-care but after the session to take practical steps look after their own wellbeing whether by themselves or with other people they trust. These kits are a resource as they can use however, whenever and as often as they like in the comfort of their own home.

# Maybe I'm Not Good Enough

Maybe I'm not good enough,  
Maybe I'm not strong,  
These bad thoughts in my head don't tell me that I belong,  
My mind is playing tricks,  
It makes me have anxiety,  
No matter what I do,  
I always feel misplaced,  
The depression makes my heart race,  
The feeling of being a disgrace,  
The imperfection on my face,  
Trying to fit in socially,  
And trying to be right,  
I sit in my bed at night for the thousandth time thinking of my poisoned mind,  
Try to be nice,  
Try to be kind,  
It's all an act,  
Can someone ask me if I am fine?  
I think the misplacement of me in the world,  
In society, makes me lonely and I am alone

-Xavier Davies, UK Youth Voice

# Activity 3: Human Bingo

## Ingredients:

1. A4 paper
2. Colourful marker pens.
3. Ruler.

## Preparation:

1. One A4 paper for each participant.
2. On each paper draw with a ruler lines to make nine boxes.
3. For each box make sure there is enough room for the category question, and space for the answer.
4. For each box add a trivial personal question (e.g. 'Do you have a pet?', 'Can you speak more than one language?').

**Note:** This could be done digitally as participants put their hands up or use the chat function to find out who matches together

## StepbyStep:

1. Once everyone has their bingo question boxes, their task is to talk to different members within the room and find a match to the questions. (This should take 5-10 minutes.)
2. Make sure to write the names of the person they ask and their answer, and you can only have one person answer per box.
3. Once the majority have a full house, all participants must gather in a circle and share their answers.

**Goal:** Not only can this session be a great icebreaker, but it can also be a great way to encourage communication in a fun and safe environment. The main goal of this session is to encourage communication between young people and help those who may feel isolated to be encouraged to engage with the group

# Activity 4: Red Flag Scenario

## Ingredients:

1. A4 paper
2. Red A4 Paper.
3. Green A4 Paper.
4. Pens (typical stationary pens).

## Preparation:

1. Youth workers this part is for you! This session you will need to think of scenarios about healthy & dependable and unhealthy relationships. Try thinking about different types of relationships and create scenarios appropriate to your young people.
2. Set out one green paper and one red paper for every participant

**Note:** This can be done over Zoom/video call using thumbs up or down or without cameras using a thumbs up button or emojis

## Step by Step

1. The youth worker leads this session by reading out the scenarios on healthy and unhealthy relationships.
2. After each scenario is read, the group should be given some time to think about their answer before sharing it
3. If the young people believe the scenario to be healthy they must raise a green paper (green flag).
4. If the young people believe the scenario to be unhealthy they must raise a red paper.
5. The final part of this session after a couple of scenarios is to start a conversation on the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and to get the young people to identify the differences and characteristics of those relationships.

**Goal:** Having healthy and dependable relationships are key to young people being able to express their feelings of loneliness and reach out to those people to overcome it. The aim of this session is about identifying negative scenarios and gaining a better understanding what is and what isn't a healthy relationship. This overtime should hopefully provide young people with the ability to identify difference between healthy & dependable relationships vs negative & unstable relationships in the future.

# Ashes to Ashes – Poem

Ashes to ashes

As gunpowder is sprinkled on the floor and turned into dust

Remnants of our laughter

Shatter like bullets into my skull

Your bones no longer look the same but have changed

Growing up they were once identical to mine in length

Once strong enough to hit on a drum make a beat that I could hum in my sleep

Your face almost seems like a dream

We pass each other and don't greet each other

But these notes are no longer familiar to me

A note: hear lies a dead friendship

Decomposed so badly I hardly recognise it's shape

Our banter once breathed life into it

But the sharp arms of the clock

Snatched at it digging it's spiked fingers into the soft belly of nostalgia

My occasional text messages acted as CPR - trying to breathe life into something that was already dead

Used my blood as a bank to deposit your pain until I was broke

Almost broken

"Remember when you signed my cast when my arm got broken"

A caste figure white enough to imagine a ghost

Snapchat haunts me reminding me of an old post.

-Laura Zuwa, Young Person

# Signposting:

## Action for Children:

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/how-to-help/support-our-campaigns/jo-cox-commission-on-loneliness/tips-for-young-people/>

Action for Children protect and support children and young people, provide practical and emotional care and support, ensure their voices are heard, and campaign to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

## Mind:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/about-loneliness/>

Mind provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

## Young Minds:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Young Minds are leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges. They're here to make sure young people get the best possible mental health support and have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties.

## stem4:

<https://stem4.org.uk/>

stem4 is a charity that promotes positive mental health in teenagers and those who support them including their families and carers, education professionals, as well as school nurses and GPs through the provision of mental health education, resilience strategies and early intervention.

## The Mix:

<https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support>

The Mix is the UK's leading support service for young people. They are here to help young people take on any challenge they're facing: from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, from break-ups to drugs. Talk to The Mix via their online community, on social, through their free, confidential helpline or their counselling service.

## Childline:

<http://www.childline.org.uk>

Childline is a free, private and confidential service for anyone under 19 in the UK. Available: 24 hours, 7 days a week Phone: 08001111

## Samaritans:

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Samaritans are a 24-hour helpline offering emotional support for anyone feeling down, distressed or struggling to cope.

Phone: 116123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

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