

LONELINESS AROUND CHRISTMAS



Loneliness

Feelings of loneliness are personal, so everyone's experience of loneliness will be different.

You might be alone on Christmas for different reasons, such as the death of a loved one, living far from relatives, or because of social isolation. If you have social anxiety disorder (SAD) and don't have close relationships with family or friends, loneliness at Christmas could be particularly hard.

One common description of loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. But loneliness is not always the same as being alone.

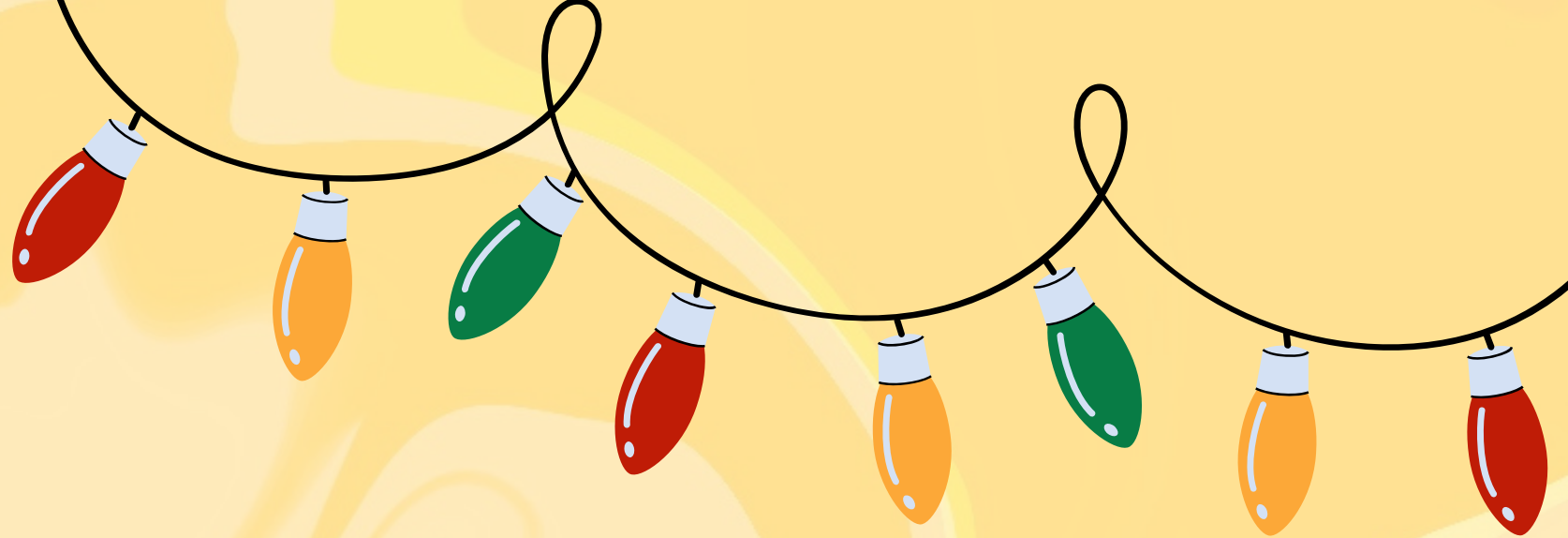
Feeling lonely isn't in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem can increase your chance of feeling lonely.

For example, some people may have misconceptions about what certain mental health problems mean, so you may find it difficult to speak to them about your problems.

Or you may experience social phobia – also known as social anxiety – and find it difficult to engage in everyday activities involving other people, which could lead to a lack of meaningful social contact and cause feelings of loneliness.



Loneliness



**My mental health
has made me lonely**

**Feeling lonely has
damaged my
mental health**

Feeling lonely can also have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if these feelings have lasted a long time. Some research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress.

What causes loneliness?

Loneliness has many different causes, which vary from person to person. We don't always understand what it is about an experience that makes us feel lonely.

For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely, such as:

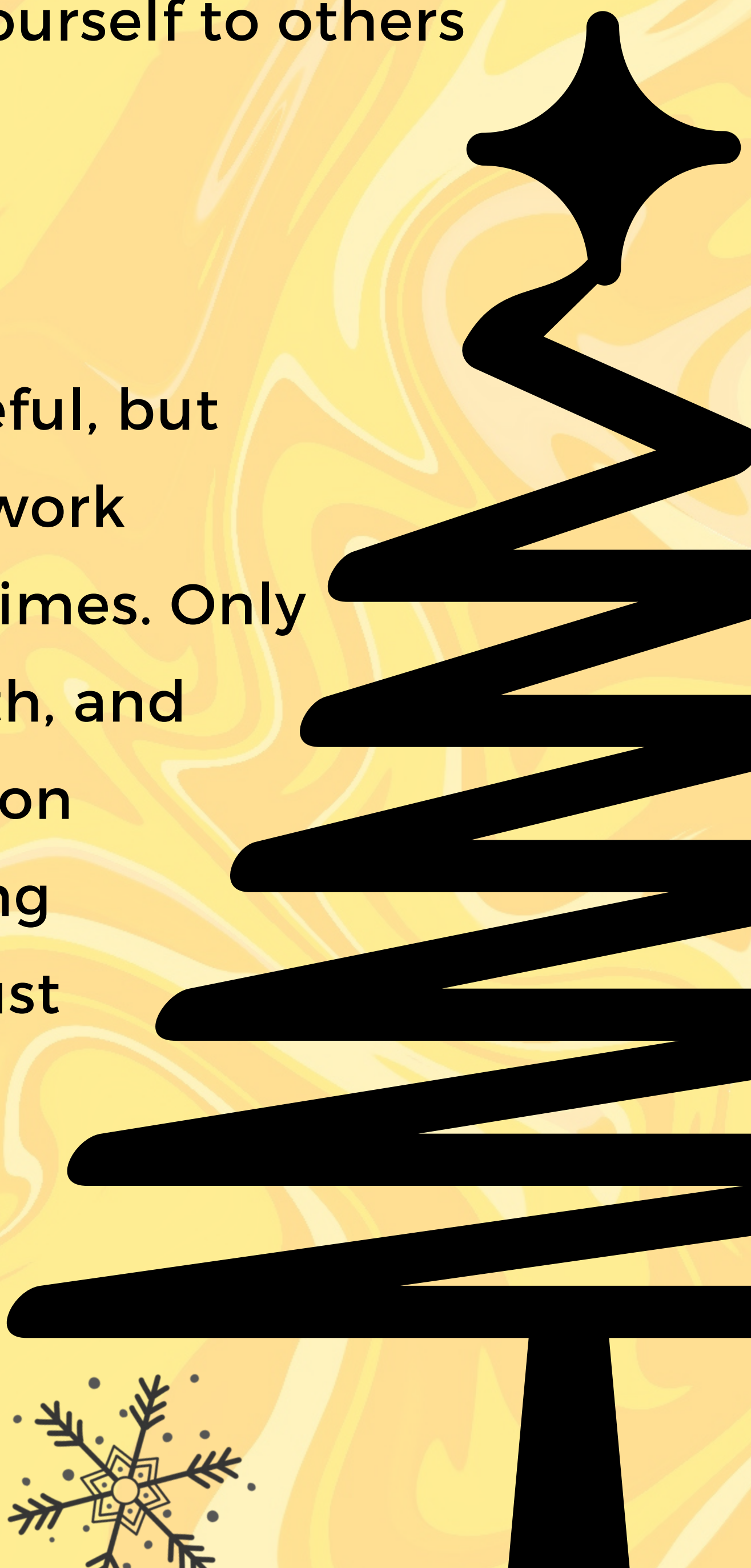
- experiencing a bereavement
- going through a relationship break-up
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- starting at university
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks.
- have no friends or family
- are estranged from your family
- are a single parent or care for someone else – you may find it hard to maintain a social life
- belong to minority groups and live in an area without others from a similar background
- are excluded from social activities due to mobility problems or a shortage of money
- experience discrimination and stigma because of a disability or long-term health problem, including mental health problems
- experience discrimination and stigma because of your gender, race or sexual orientation
- have experienced sexual or physical abuse
 - you may find it harder to form close relationships with other people.



How can I manage loneliness?

- Take it slow
- Make new connections
- Try to open up
- Talking therapies
- Social care
- Be careful when comparing yourself to others
- Look after yourself
- consider volunteering

Some people find these ideas useful, but remember that different things work for different people at different times. Only try what you feel comfortable with, and try not to put too much pressure on yourself. If something isn't working for you (or doesn't feel possible just now), you can try something else, or come back to it another time.



Tips to manage loneliness

Try peer support

There are many different types of peer support service, which provide people with a space to use their own experiences to help and support each other, including experiences of loneliness and related mental health problems. These are some different types of peer support which you may find useful:

- Try a befriender service. charities offer befriender volunteer befrienders in touch with people feeling lonely.
- Join an online community like Side by Side. These communities can provide a place to listen and share with others who have similar experiences. They are available 24/7, most are free and you can access them wherever you are.



Tips to manage loneliness

Make new connections

If you are feeling lonely because of a lack of satisfying social contact in your life, you could try to meet more, or different people.

- Try to join a class or group based on your hobbies or interests. This could include online groups if you can't attend things in person.
- If you are able to, volunteering is a good way of meeting people. Helping others can also really help improve your mental health. It is also a good idea to check that you will receive adequate support from the organisation you are volunteering at.



Helpful links

If you or someone you know is feeling lonely, the following organisations can help.

Cruse Bereavement Support: resources and one to one support if you are grieving.

T: 0808 808 1677 (various hours, daily)

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

Family Lives: family support services offered through a helpline, live chat and email support.

T: 0808 800 2222 (various hours, daily)

W: <https://www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help>

Mind: a range of information on loneliness and an infoline signposting service.

T: 0300 123 3393 (9am – 6pm, Monday to Friday)

W: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Samaritans: a free listening service for whatever you are going through.

T: 116 123 (24 hours, daily)

W: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Sense: a range of advice, support and services on disability and loneliness.

T: 0300 330 9256 (9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday)

W: <https://www.sense.org.uk/get-in-touch/contact-information-and-advice/>

SupportLine: confidential and emotional support for people who are isolated or at risk.

T: 01708 765 200

W: <https://www.supportline.org.uk/>

Royal Voluntary Service: one-to-one, group and online services to improve health, wellbeing, confidence and connections.

W: <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/>

The British Red Cross: a range of resources and a dedicated helpline if you feel lonely or worried.

T: 0808 196 3651 (10am – 6pm, daily)

W: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help>

