

Facing loneliness - Tips for volunteers

Loneliness is a theme that emerges in almost all of the Red Cross Friend activities. It is important for volunteers to have both the confidence and the willingness to talk about it. It is also worth remembering that although change can be difficult, loneliness can be reduced—and it is possible to overcome it.

Offering hope and helping to maintain hope are among the most important tasks of the Red Cross.

About loneliness

- Loneliness is a **negative emotional state** associated with the feeling that one's **social relationships are not sufficient to meet one's needs**. It is different from being alone.
- **Loneliness is common**. It affects people of all ages. Loneliness can last for a short period in life or continue for many years.
- **Loneliness does not depend on the number of social relationships**; the quality of relationships is more important.
- **There are many different causes and background factors** behind loneliness. Some of the most common are listed below:
 - *Individual factors* (shyness, anxiety, functional limitations, social skills, past life experiences, ways of thinking and acting, etc.)
 - *Life situations or changes in life* (moving, changing jobs or schools, unemployment, financial difficulties, illness, etc.)
 - *Environmental factors* (transport connections, tolerance, sense of community, etc.)
 - *Societal and cultural factors*

Talking about loneliness

- You do not need to have special expertise, nor do you need to solve another person's problems. The most important thing is to be present and to give the person experiencing loneliness an opportunity to be heard and encountered.
- Talking about loneliness is in itself one way to reduce loneliness. Putting feelings and thoughts related to loneliness into words helps a person better understand their own experience and recognize the factors that have led to it. This can also help in finding possible solutions to the situation.
- In group discussions, volunteers create space for peer support, which can play an important role in processing loneliness. For some, loneliness may also involve feelings of shame. It can therefore be a relief to realize that one is not alone in one's experience. Hearing others' experiences can also open up new perspectives and give courage to seek new social connections in life.

Questions to support discussion

Exploring the experience

"How often do you feel lonely?"

"How long have you been feeling lonely?"

"Are you able to identify any reasons that have contributed to your loneliness?"

"Can you describe in more detail what creates the feeling of being excluded?"

Relationships

"Is there anyone in your life with whom you can be completely yourself?"

"What kind of relationships would you like to have in your life?"

"What makes meeting new people feel difficult?"

Opportunities

"Have you thought about where you could meet new people, either online or in your local area?"

"Have you ever tried thinking in advance of questions you could ask someone you meet for the first time?"

Reflecting on thought patterns

"How would you like other people to take you into account in a situation like this?"

"Do you think others are deliberately leaving you out of the conversation, or could it be that they are not aware that they are doing so?"

"Why do you think others do not understand or accept you?"

Talking about loneliness is not always easy, but by asking questions you show that you are ready to talk about the topic.

Respond with empathy and foster hope

"It must be hard if you have been experiencing loneliness for such a long time."

"It is great that you are able to speak openly about your experience of loneliness!"

"Even though it may feel difficult, building new social relationships is possible."

"If you want, we can think together about what kind of relationships you would like to have in your life."

"You do not have to accept being treated badly."

"Do not let loneliness define who you are."

"Did you know that social skills can be developed throughout life?"

"Remember that it is possible to overcome loneliness."

"Uncertainty in social situations can ease when you think about situations in advance."