

FACT SHEET



RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO SOCIAL ISOLATION

A practical guide for Community Engagement Points

OVERVIEW

- Feeling connected to others is vital for wellbeing and a key protective factor for mental health.
- Social isolation can occur when people have few relationships or limited opportunities for meaningful interaction.
- Disconnection may be caused by life changes such as retirement, grief, remote living, disability, working from home, or moving to a new community.
- Persistent loneliness can impact mood, motivation, physical health, sleep and daily functioning.
- People who feel isolated may experience sadness, anxiety, frustration or a sense of not belonging.
- Because disconnection is often hidden or stigmatised, many people avoid speaking about it directly.
- Social isolation can develop slowly and may be masked by busyness or routine.
- Not all experiences of loneliness require a formal service response.
- Sometimes the most powerful support is simple human connection — being noticed, welcomed and listened to.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This fact sheet is for any Community Engagement Point that may come into contact with people experiencing loneliness or social disconnection.

This includes, but isn't limited to:

- Libraries and community hubs
- Men's Sheds and women's groups
- Community centres and neighbourhood houses
- Sporting clubs and recreation facilities
- Op shops and second-hand stores
- Art, music, craft or hobby groups
- Churches, mosques, temples and faith communities
- Volunteer organisations
- Local cafés and social enterprises
- Seniors groups and aged care social programs
- Parenting groups and early years programs

As a Community Engagement Point (CEP), you may be in a unique position to notice when someone is feeling isolated. We are building a Network of Community Engagement Points (local people and places) who can offer connection, compassion and, when needed, a warm pathway to further support.

Anywhere people naturally spend their time — and naturally seek connection — may become a moment of support.



Network of Community Engagement Points (NetCEP) is a program that enables trusted people and places, like community centres, sports clubs, and local businesses — to offer a compassionate first response when someone is having a tough time. Read more at www.netcep.com.au.



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Social isolation isn't always obvious. Some people may talk about feeling lonely, while others express it in indirect or subtle ways. As a Community Engagement Point, you might notice:

- Low mood, sadness, irritability or increased anxiety
- Comments like "I don't really have anyone to talk to" or "I've just been keeping to myself lately"
- Reduced participation in activities they once enjoyed
- Showing up frequently to places without clear purpose, or staying longer than usual
- Talking about feeling invisible, excluded or disconnected
- Difficulty sleeping, low energy or trouble concentrating
- Signs of withdrawing — turning down invitations, keeping conversations brief, making excuses to avoid social contact

Any of these may signal that someone is carrying feelings of loneliness beneath the surface.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

You don't need to "fix" someone's situation — but you can create a moment of meaningful connection. You can:

- Offer a warm, welcoming conversation
- Listen with curiosity and without judgement
- Acknowledge the courage it takes to talk about loneliness
- Suggest community groups, activities or ways to get involved
- Help them feel seen, valued and included
- Keep it simple and human — you don't need details about their personal situation
- If they're open to it, connect them with the local Short-Term Support Team (STST) for free, confidential, short-term support
- Reassure them that seeking connection and support is a positive step

Early recognition and a warm response can help someone feel less alone and more able to take steady steps toward rebuilding connection.

IN PRACTICE

AT THE LOCAL LIBRARY

1

Chris, a librarian, notices that an older man — Peter — comes in daily and spends long hours in the reading area but rarely interacts with anyone.

Over time, Peter mentions that since retiring, he doesn't have many people to talk to.

2

Chris responds by listening without judgement and making Peter feel welcome. He encourages Peter to consider joining the weekly book club, helping him reconnect socially.

Chris also gently lets him know about the Short-Term Support Team (STST) if he ever wants extra support.

3

Peter doesn't want a referral immediately, but he appreciates the conversation and knows support is available.

Over the following weeks, he begins attending the book club and slowly reconnects with others — improving his confidence and sense of belonging.

