

The background of the central section is a light pink color. It is decorated with two strings of bunting. The top string of bunting starts from the left edge and curves downwards towards the right. The bottom string of bunting starts from the left edge and curves upwards towards the right. The bunting consists of several triangular flags in various shades of pink and purple. The text is centered in the middle of this section.

**LINK
TOGETHER
TO ALLEVIATE
LONELINESS**

Foreword

Throughout the WI's 106-year history, members have sought to reach out to others in their communities and further afield, offering a chance for women to come together to make friends, learn new skills, and work for change on the issues that matter to them.

While tackling loneliness has always been part of the WI's ethos, members brought it to the forefront of WI's national campaigning agenda with the launch of our Link Together campaign in 2017.

Loneliness is a big challenge in our modern society, affecting anyone of any age and background. However, the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020 has made these issues even more acute. With the country spending more time at home, working remotely, and having less physical contact with friends or family over the last two years, 41 per cent of adults say they feel lonelier since the first lockdown period according to the British Red Cross.

However, loneliness is not a new problem. According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, prior to the pandemic, 45 per cent of adults in England, or around 25 million people, felt lonely occasionally, sometimes, or often.

Thankfully, there is more focus than ever before on tackling this public health challenge. In 2018, we welcomed the Government's launch of the first loneliness strategy, which has since been followed by three subsequent reports marking a positive shift in the way loneliness is seen and acted upon.

The aim of the WI's Link Together campaign has been to shine a light on the issue of loneliness, tackle the stigma associated with it, as well as provide opportunities for people to connect. The response from members, and the impact of this campaign, has been incredible.

The WI is in a special position in its ability to help tackle loneliness with around 190,000 members, and I'm proud of the many new and creative ways in which WI members have come together to support each other and their communities especially in what has been a very difficult time during the Coronavirus pandemic. As we move forward and the Link Together campaign is progressed on a local level, I have no doubt this will continue.

I hope you enjoy finding out more about what we have achieved together and, most importantly, take inspiration for how you can continue to make a difference as part of this campaign. Thank you for all your support with the campaign!



Nicky Amos,
Chair of NFWI Public Affairs Committee

Background

The scale of loneliness in the UK

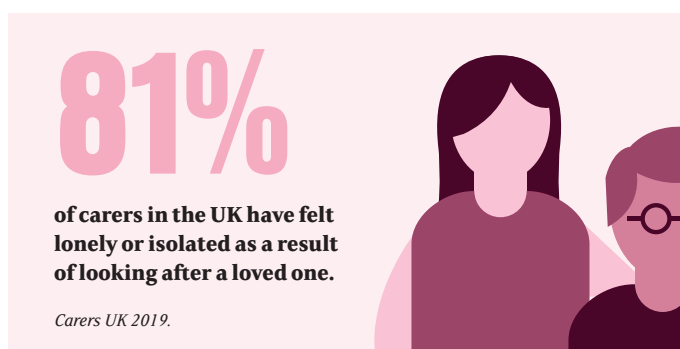
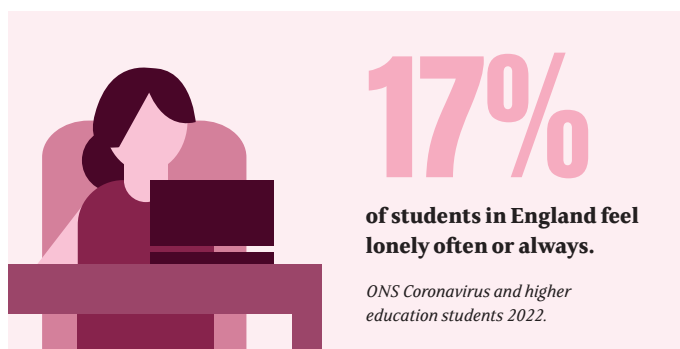
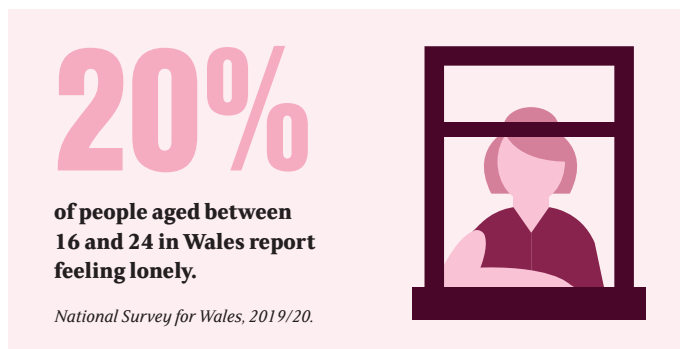
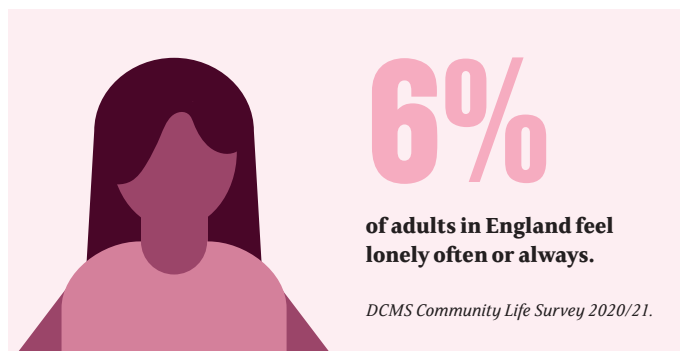
Estimates from before the pandemic suggested that 45 per cent of all adults in England feel lonely “occasionally, sometimes or often”. In Wales, data from 2016 to 2021 found that 16 per cent of all adults reported feeling lonely.

Loneliness can affect anyone, and everyone’s experiences are different. However, some groups of people are more likely to experience loneliness than others, such as people who:

- have no friends or family, or are widowed
- experience discrimination because of their gender, race, or sexual orientation
- have poorer health or a long-term illness or disability
- have experienced sexual or physical abuse
- are single parents or carers

According to a 2018 ONS study, women were more likely to report feeling lonely than men overall. The report explains that this may, in part, reflect differences in how men and women reflect on their personal experiences of loneliness. Interpreting the findings, the Campaign to End Loneliness suggests that men may be less willing to admit to feeling lonely due to traditional gender roles, or perhaps while some men are isolated, they do not necessarily feel lonely.

Research also shows that both older and younger people report higher levels of loneliness than those of other age groups. Age UK suggests that while the chance of experiencing loneliness does not differ because of age, certain life circumstances, in particular transitions (such as leaving education or work, the death of a partner or loved one, and experiencing illness and disability), can increase the risk of loneliness, and these tend to occur at different ages.





The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on experiences of loneliness

In many ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the problem of loneliness. In particular, this is due to a lack of meaningful contact during times of increased restrictions, less informal and formal support, and increased anxiety. Although social distancing measures and other rules have changed and eased over time, the longer-term challenges of Covid-19 will mean many people still experience loneliness.

According to the British Red Cross, 41 per cent of adults in the UK say they feel lonelier since lockdown, and 31 per cent say they often feel alone and like they have no one to turn to. This is likely to have a lasting impact. The Campaign to End Loneliness suggests that 3.3 million people (6.3 per cent) felt chronically lonely between September and November 2021, when lockdown restrictions had eased.

Research has also shown that some people have been more affected by the impacts of the pandemic than others and are at greater risk of loneliness. These include: people from ethnic minority backgrounds, parents with young children, young people, those living with long term physical and mental health conditions, people on lower incomes and those with limited access to digital technology and the internet.

Loneliness as an ongoing public health challenge

Feeling lonely, particularly if you have been feeling this way for a long time or have not had access to support, can have a negative effect on mental and physical health. Research suggests that loneliness can increase the risk of some mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

Loneliness is also associated with physical health issues, including an increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, dementia and even death.

There is also a significant cost to society associated with loneliness. A UK Government report from 2020 estimated the wellbeing, health and work productivity cost associated with severe loneliness to be around £9,900 per person per year.

The UK Government's strategy to tackle loneliness

In the time since the WI's Link Together campaign was launched in 2017, the Government has recognised loneliness as a serious public health concern and made tackling it a national priority.

In 2018, the UK was the first country in the world to launch a loneliness strategy, *A Connected Society*. This adopted many of the recommendations from the report of the Jo Cox Commission on loneliness, which highlighted the need for national leadership in tackling loneliness, as well as cross-government work, a loneliness minister, and standardised measures of loneliness.

In its Strategy, the Government committed to reducing stigma, driving a lasting shift of cross-government policymaking, and improving the evidence base on loneliness.

In the same year, a Minister for Loneliness was appointed as the world's first. A £11.5 million fund was also launched, and a "recommended measurement package" to improve the evidence base was developed.

In June 2019, the Government launched its campaign #LetsTalkLoneliness to tackle stigma and raise awareness of loneliness. The campaign was relaunched in 2020 to encourage people to talk about loneliness during the pandemic. It included new guidance and tips for people to look after themselves and others.

As part of its work to tackle loneliness during the pandemic and commitment to drive a lasting shift in policymaking, the Government also set up the Tackling Loneliness Network, a cross-sector group of organisations. The group has developed actions to tackle loneliness as part of a connected recovery from COVID-19, which includes establishing a Tackling Loneliness Hub to share best practice among local organisations, supporting more councils to tackle loneliness, and launching a public awareness campaign to reduce stigma targeted at young people. A cross-government group of ministers has also been established to tackle the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing, including loneliness.

The Welsh Government's strategy to tackle loneliness

In Wales, a loneliness strategy was published in February 2020, following a consultation held in 2018. It outlined four priority areas: increasing opportunities for people to connect, improving community infrastructure, encouraging cohesive and supportive communities, and building awareness and positive attitudes.

In addition to the need for a national focus on the issue, the Welsh Government's strategy on loneliness recognises that local actors play an important role. To support action on a local level, a Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund was launched in 2021, providing £1,500,000 over three years for local authorities and County Voluntary Councils to help them support community groups in their areas who bring people together.

In addition, a number of Public Service Boards, which are required to carry out a well-being assessment and publish an annual local well-being plan, have now identified tackling loneliness as a priority in their areas. This is a welcome development and something which the WI has called for since the launch of our campaign in 2017.

What the WI's campaign called for

"This meeting calls on every WI and the NFWI to work alongside health and social care providers and their local communities to raise awareness of the causes and impacts of loneliness, thus ensuring better identification of lonely people in order to be able to offer them the appropriate support and assistance".

*2017 resolution, North Cave WI,
East Yorkshire Federation*

"Each WI can act locally, we know our communities; our members have a wealth of life experiences that can be shared; we are an inventive and supportive organisation that can affect change in several ways. We can work alongside local health and social care providers, and other community groups to ensure strategies to combat loneliness are embedded in community services. In many ways the WI already does this for our members, so we are well placed to lead the way".

*Maggie Whitlock, resolution proposer, North Cave WI,
East Yorkshire Federation, NFWI Annual Meeting 2017*

The Link Together to alleviate loneliness campaign aimed to increase awareness of the issue of loneliness, its causes and impacts, and help to make sure that anyone who is lonely, or at risk of loneliness, has access to the support and assistance they need.

Key NFWI activity

On a national level, the WI:

- **Contributed to the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness' report.** In the summer of 2017, more than 500 people contributed to the NFWI's Loneliness Survey, which invited members and non-members to share their views and experiences of the issue and what they believe could be done at local and national levels to tackle it. The key findings were shared with the Commission to help inform its final report '*Combating loneliness one conversation at a time*', published at the end of 2017. The report was an important influence on the Government's first loneliness strategy in 2018.
- **Teamed up with other organisations to support national community initiatives that aim to bring people together, such as the Great Get Together and the Big Lunch.** In 2019, for example, the Jo Cox Foundation and the NFWI produced a toolkit for members to use when taking part in the Great Get Together, and in 2022 we hosted a virtual event with Tracey Robbins, Head of UK Delivery, Big Jubilee Lunch to encourage WIs around the country to get involved. Both initiatives continue to be key fixtures in the WI's campaign each year.



League of Ladies WI, Derbyshire Federation, took to their high street on World Kindness Day 2019 armed with 121 individual flowers with messages of kindness

- **Fed into national policy inquiries on loneliness.**

In 2019, NFWI-Wales contributed to the Welsh Government's consultation on its draft loneliness and social isolation strategy.

In addition, in 2020, the NFWI contributed to inquiries held by the APPG on Social Integration and the APPG on Loneliness to share how WI members have been tackling loneliness and supporting their communities, and to help build a picture of the impact of the pandemic on a local level.

- **Joined the /Together coalition.** The coalition was set up in 2020 with the aim of bringing people together and bridging divides across society. In 2020, WI members took part in the coalition's Talk/Together initiative by contributing to a public conversation about what divides and unites us, and what could bring our society together during the pandemic. The outcome of these conversations, which included a national survey, was published in a report which found that people across the country have experienced an upsurge of community spirit in response to adversity. The NFWI continues to support the work of the Coalition, including by sitting on the Steering Group which guides its direction.



Sea Girls WI, Cornwall Federation, delivering meals from local restaurants that had to close during the pandemic

- **Supported members to stay connected during the pandemic.** The pandemic increased the risk of experiencing loneliness, with people not being able to meet or connect in person. Some WIs found they attracted new members as they offered women a way to connect with others. Throughout the pandemic, the NFWI has shared information, resources, and sources of support. Examples of this included:

- monitoring social restrictions and developing guidance and suggestions for holding activities online, using social media or adapting in-person activities in line with public health guidance;
- developing virtual WIs, an offer which has helped the WI widen its reach and embrace members who might find in-person WIs difficult to access, such as carers, or working women whose hours mean they wouldn't otherwise be able to attend meetings;
- 'meetings in a bag'. A way to connect with members by sending packages of activities, news, crafts and even tea bags to encourage members to look after themselves and connect; and
- developing a 'Keep Connected' leaflet, distributed through WI Life, to encourage members to get in touch with each other.



Alongside our Link Together campaign, the NFWI has also worked to tackle loneliness through our Get on Board for a Better Bus Service campaign which recognises the importance of public transport in alleviating loneliness and addressing social isolation. You can read more about this campaign and what we have achieved so far on our website.

How members got involved with the Link Together campaign

Since the campaign was launched in 2017, members have played an important role in connecting their communities and combating loneliness, including through volunteering, everyday small acts of kindness, and by bringing their local areas together as part of national initiatives such as the Great Get Together or to mark national awareness days.



Romanby WI, North Yorkshire East Federation, joined lockdown VE Day celebrations by displaying an interactive bunting in their local community

Shipton under Wychwood WI, Oxfordshire Federation, invited local residential homes and people in the local community to come along and mingle and enjoy free tea and coffee along with homemade cakes



Heworth WI,
North Yorkshire East Federation

Cale Green WI
@WICaleGreen
Follow

#cakeforkindness
#calegreenwicakeforkindness
#worldkindnessday
#worldkindnessday2019 Cale Green WI all ready to distribute cake around Stockport and beyond to spread the word of kindness tomorrow #bekind



Cale Green WI,
Cheshire Federation



Bryncethin WI, Glamorgan Federation celebrated the 2017 Great Get Together by holding a garden party



Mitton WI, Gloucestershire Federation, left flowers for strangers on World Kindness Day 2018

Pentyrch WI, Glamorgan Federation, established a monthly 'Happy Gathering' club with emphasis on chatting and having fun. Volunteer drivers give lifts to the meetings for people who have difficulties getting there on their own



Penn & Tylers Green Evening WI, Buckinghamshire Federation, ran a village expo inviting local clubs, societies, and voluntary organisations to host stalls at the village hall



Streatham WI and Streatham Common WI, Surrey Federation, handed out crocheted flowers in their community



Brixham WI, Devon Federation, made flower posies to hand out to neighbours or former WI members



Redlands WI, Berkshire Federation, visited residents of their local care home with cakes for an afternoon chat



President Jayne Sims, Finningley WI, South Yorkshire Federation, delivering books in her community during the Covid pandemic



Valerie Hughes, Sutton WI, Norfolk Federation founded the Penpal Exchange for WI members in response to the campaign. The exchange is estimated to have matched over 1000 new pen pals

How you and your WI can take the campaign forward

It's been five years since the loneliness resolution was passed, and members have been busy campaigning since then. The success of this campaign has been down to the individual actions of members in their homes and local communities. If you or your WI have not yet been involved, it's not too late. We hope you use this legacy pack to get inspired.

1. Check in with those around you and reach out if you are feeling lonely.

A lot of people have been, and continue to be, affected by the pandemic and some may still be uncomfortable or unable to see other people face-to-face. However, loneliness has many causes and sometimes the reason isn't clear. If you notice signs that someone you care about might be lonely there are ways you can help. It's important that everyone feels they have someone to turn to, and Age UK explains that simply being there for someone, and being willing to listen without judgement, can be a great comfort. If you are experiencing loneliness, there are coping strategies you can try to find what works for you and places you can access support if you feel that would be helpful.

In the back of this toolkit, you can find a list of sources of support that you could use as a starting point for talking to people around you, or to reach out if you are feeling lonely yourself. The list can be cut out and shared with anyone who needs it.

2. Reach out to women in your community and consider what more your WI can do to make sure it is open and welcoming to all.

WIs play an important role as a welcoming community space. A WI membership offers women the opportunity to meet other women in their local area, to make friends, and make a difference in their community.

By reaching out to women in your area and ensuring your WI is accessible, you can help to tackle loneliness.

Even the smallest of changes can have a big impact and help to ensure that members feel well-supported. For some ideas, download our 2018 campaign toolkit.

PUBLICISING YOUR WI

When planning to promote your WI, meeting, or event, it's important to consider the full range of opportunities available to you. WIs can engage with the public on every available media platform and there are many ways to spread your message, including:

- local events listings (in newspapers and online)
- community noticeboards
- local radio channels
- Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- setting up a website for your WI

For more ideas and guidance on running your WI and recruiting new members, visit My WI.

mywi.thewi.org.uk/communications-and-pr/publicising-your-wi

Here are a few tips on reaching out to women in your area:

- Take part in local events to help promote your WI.
- Share information about your WI's programme and activities on your social media page or website if your WI has one to encourage people to come along and visit. You can also post about your WI on community social media accounts such as local Facebook pages.
- Keep your programme varied and interesting to ensure all members interests and hobbies are covered. If you need some ideas, ask for suggestions from current members.
- Create posters to attract new members. These could be displayed on local news boards at local shops/halls/libraries etc. For advice on putting together promotional materials, visit mywi.thewi.org.uk/communications-and-pr/publicising-your-wi/promotional-materials
- Word of mouth is also a great way to attract interest to your WI and members could be encouraged to bring along a friend to a meeting.
- A dedicated WI Welcoming Team is an effective way of creating a welcoming WI and ensure there is always someone there to welcome new members and visitors.

For more information visit: mywi.thewi.org.uk/running-your-wi/members-resources/wi-welcoming-teams

4. Take part in annual community events and initiatives or arrange your own.

The Great Get Together and the Big Lunch are two initiatives held every year to promote community activities. Both are great opportunities to connect with your community and new people. For more information, details about when they take place, and how to get involved in events that are planned around the country, visit www.greatgettogether.org and edenprojectcommunities.com

Alternatively, you could arrange your own events, such as regular community socials, excursions, or picnics. You can find more inspiration in our Great Get Together Toolkit available on My WI.

3. Consider listing your WI as a community resource for social prescribing.

Social prescribing - sometimes referred to as community referral – is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. They are often provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Activities can include, for example, gardening, volunteering, befriending, cookery, and healthy eating.

In its most basic form, social prescribing is about suggesting positive lifestyle changes rather than – or sometimes alongside – medical treatment.

If your WI is interested in getting involved in social prescribing, contact your local GP surgery and/or local authority to explore becoming a community resource. Whether an organisation receives social prescribing referrals depends firstly on whether local link workers are aware of it, and then on how well it meets the community's needs.

You can read more about getting involved in social prescribing on My WI:

mywi.thewi.org.uk/running-your-wi/members-resources/social-prescribing-guidance

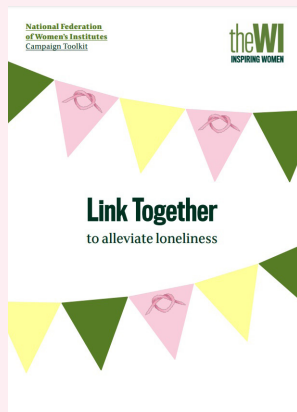
5. Celebrate World Kindness Day on 13 November.

World Kindness Day is marked every year on 13 November and is a chance for members to come together to spread joy, increase your WI's visibility and have fun.

How about making small gifts to hand out to people in your community as conversation starters or holding a cake stand on your high street? You can take inspiration from other WIs on pages 8 & 9 or use the guide included in this pack to make a paper pocket folder as a gift for someone.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The following campaign resources are available to download on My WI:



- Campaign action pack (2017)
- Campaign toolkit (2018) incl. the checklist "Make sure your WI or federation is open and welcoming to all"
- The WI and Jo Cox Foundation Great Get Together Toolkit (2019)
- Sources of information leaflet (p. 15)

Act of Kindness paper pocket folder

Project: Alison Mercer

This paper pocket folder is a fun and easy craft project with pockets you can fill with affirmations or kind, inspiring messages.

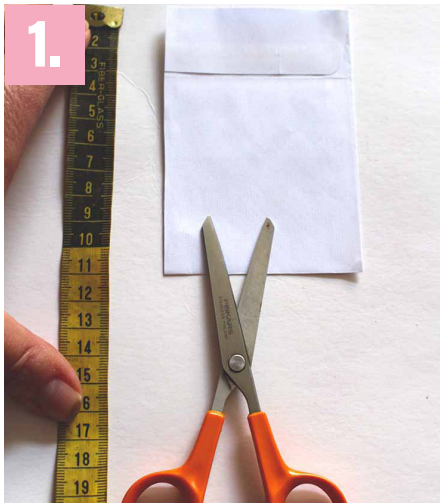
Why not make it at your next meeting to give away as a random act of kindness or use as a conversation starter with people around you?



You will need:

- Scissors
- PVA glue PVA or quick glue pen
- Print block
- Ink stamp pad
- 2 sheets of A4 card
- 2 DL envelopes (110mm x 220mm)
- 91m length of raffia or ribbon
- A bone folder (optional)
- Hole punch

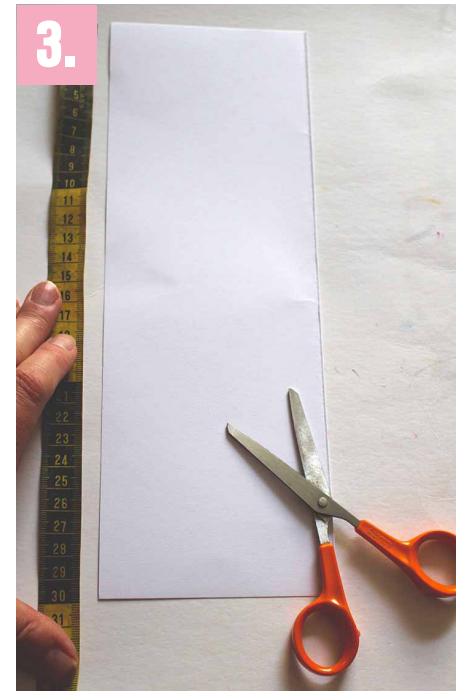
Tip: You can use recycled card, envelopes and ribbon for this project.



1. Seal the envelopes before cutting each of them into 3 x 7cm-wide strips by the depth of the envelope. Glue the open sides together with PVA glue or a quick glue pen and trim off the tops, about 1mm from the top folded edge.



2. Print each trimmed envelope with your design front and back. Put to the side while you work on the cover.



3. Measure and cut out a cover from 1 sheet of card measuring 11cm wide by 30cm high.



4. Print both sides of the cover, so that it matches the envelopes.



5. Cut pieces from the remaining sheets of card to fit the envelopes, approximately 5.5cm x 10.5cm each. Check that they fit inside the printed envelopes, trimming them down if necessary.

Cut the top 2 corners at angles and decorate if you like, but remember to leave room for writing– you can write on both the front and back of the cards.

6.



Fold the cover in half across its width, leaving approximately 3cm protruding at 1 end for a flap. If you have a bone folder, use it to crease the edges. You can cut the 2 corners of the flap diagonally too if desired.

9.



Place a small dab of glue in the centre of the back cover with the flap. Place the envelope just above the central crease with their openings facing towards the flap. Double check that the top flap will fold over.

7.



Fold the flap over the top and use the bone folder to crease.

10.



Dab a spot of glue on the other side of the cover and fold it up and over. Use a bone folder to smooth down the cover and leave to dry.

8.



Stack the envelopes with their openings at the top and glue 1 on top of the other with a small dab of PVA glue (remember less is more).

11.



When dry, open up the folder – it should look like the image above.

12.



Slide a card into each section of the folder. Then make a hole in the centre of the flap with a hole-punch and thread the raffia or ribbon through. Write affirmations or kind words on the cards. Tie your book and keep it somewhere safe.



ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW FEELING LONELY?

Feeling lonely can be tough and different things can help different people. If you would like to speak to someone about how you are feeling, find out about things you can try that may help, or get advice if you think someone you know might be struggling, there are organisations here to support you.



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Link Together
to alleviate loneliness

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

Mind

mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/

The mental health charity Mind has gathered information on a range of mental health topics, including loneliness. They have also developed a list of tips you might find useful for dealing with loneliness.

You can contact Mind's Infoline, which provides an information and signposting service, between 9am and 6pm Monday to Friday. Call **0300 123 3393** or email info@mind.org.uk

The Jo Cox Foundation

jocoxfoundation.org/loneliness_directory

The Jo Cox Foundation has created a Loneliness Directory with sources of support, information about volunteering opportunities, and ways to connect with people.

Campaign to End Loneliness

campaigntoendloneliness.org/helpful-links/

Offers a list of helpful links to organisations that provide a range of support, advice, and services. These include general resources, as well as sources of support for young people, such as YoungMinds, and for older people, such as Age UK and Independent Age.

NHS Every Mind Matters

nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/life-challenges/loneliness/

As part of their Every Mind Matters campaign, the NHS has developed some practical advice and tips that can help if you are feeling lonely or looking for ways to support others with their mental health. It also explains how to access more support through the NHS and highlights other places you can reach out to for further help.



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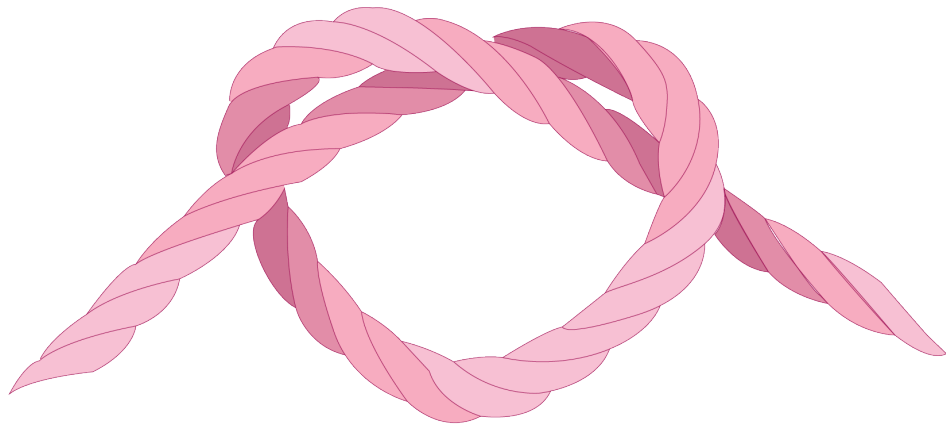
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Link Together

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