What approach should I take if I think an older person is lonely?

Nurses need the skills to identify loneliness so they can choose appropriate services or interventions.

Lonely. This gives nurses ideal opportunities to reach out to them.

Once a person at high risk of loneliness has been identified, the nurse should initiate a discussion during the consultation. This may be as part of a comprehensive geriatric assessment, transition to a care home, routine health check or home visit.

The Campaign to End Loneliness (2011) provides tools to measure levels of loneliness.

Person-centred response

Once it has been established that someone is lonely, a person-centred response is required. This should involve discussion with the person concerned to establish his or her circumstances and needs. Such discussions also allow nurses to identify the appropriate local services or intervention to boost the person’s well-being.

Research demonstrates group-based, one-to-one and technology interventions achieve the best results.

Where the barriers to leaving a home are too great to overcome, befriending services are highly valued.

Face-to-face is the preferred method, but phone calls can be a useful alternative (Cattan et al 2005).

Given the prevalence of loneliness among older people, and the negative effect it has on their health and well-being, nurses in all settings should develop the skills to sensitively identify the individual circumstances and needs of people at risk.

Nurses also need the local knowledge to offer lonely older people appropriate services or interventions.

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References


