

How to beat feeling lonely and isolated while you work

The social connection that comes with a job can be really beneficial to our work, and to our lives. Having colleagues there to share wins, talk through issues, rely on, join activities with or just chat to – this can make a big difference to the way we approach and enjoy work.

But there are times when keeping that social connection alive can be hard. Work environments can change – sometimes quickly – making it harder to connect. And now that more people are working remotely, many are finding it hard to feel connected from afar.

So, whether you're working from home, working differently, or just noticing that you feel lonely while you work, here's what you can do to feel connected again.

What makes us feel lonely

Loneliness and social isolation have long been around, but these feelings have become even more challenging for New Zealanders since the outbreak of COVID-19. The need for physical distancing measures during the pandemic meant changes to the way we connect, with in-person contact, and more screen time, and some of these things have stayed in place even as lockdowns ended.

“What makes us feel lonely is a perceived lack of quality connections in our life,” says Sabina Read, SEEK’s Resident Psychologist. “Loneliness is not about how many connections or relationships you have or don’t have, but it’s about the quality of those relationships. Read says throughout the pandemic, many people have felt lonely and socially isolated because there were fewer opportunities for meaningful exchanges.

The impact of feeling lonely or socially isolated

Without as many chances for meaningful connection, we can feel sad, unmotivated, ‘heavy’, withdrawn or teary. “We are hardwired to connect with other people, but due to the pandemic we have been forced out of our work tribes,” Read says. “But there is still a lot we can do to connect and foster those relationships in our social network.”

How to handle feelings of loneliness

Everyone has felt lonely at some stage in their life, but your previous experiences can be really valuable in helping you navigate feelings of social isolation. Here are three things you can try:

1. **Seek out opportunities to connect**

“It may take a little more effort than before but it’s important you look for [ways to connect with your colleagues and peers](#)

,” Read says. “You can do this in a number of ways – like setting up an online channel for sharing non-work news, having quick, regular virtual check-ins.” Or, if it’s safe and practical for you to do so where you are, organise to get lunch or pop out for a coffee with a colleague. They may well have been craving the chance for social connection, too.

2. **Tell someone**

While you may feel unsure about sharing your feelings, you’re definitely not alone in this.

“One of the positive things to come out of the pandemic is that everyone is in the same boat,” Read says. “So, if you tell your boss, colleagues or friends you’re feeling isolated, it’s likely they will have experienced those feelings too and will understand.”

3. **Draw on your experience**

When we feel lonely or socially isolated, sometimes it seems like it’s new territory to navigate, but most of us already have the tools we need to manage these emotions.

“We’ve all had times of feeling lonely, so think about what you did to manage those feelings in the past,” Read says. “Some people are helped by going for walks and making eye contact with people and saying hello, others like to speak to a friend or colleague and some people reduce their feelings of isolation by doing something nice for another person.”

The key to combating loneliness at work is making small efforts to connect with others on a regular basis. It can be helpful to remember that loneliness and isolation aren’t fixed states, but rather feelings that will ebb and flow.

By thinking of these emotions as a reminder or sign that we’re hungry for connectedness, we can start trying strategies to combat these feelings and find that sense of connection again.

The situation around COVID-19 can bring up difficult feelings and emotions, but you don’t have to handle them alone. If you’re finding things tough at the moment, there’s support available to help you. The [Mental Health Foundation](#) has a range of information especially for the pandemic as well as [numbers you can call](#), and the [Ministry of Health](#) has tools and resources that relate to COVID-19 and more.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature on behalf of SEEK. Interviewing 4000 Kiwis annually.

Read more:

- [5 ways to bring the social side of work to life online](#)

- [How to structure your day when you work from home](#)
- [3 signs you're at risk of burnout and what to do next](#)