

Who is beside you?

A 90-minute coaching lesson on loneliness, listening and belonging



Purpose

Help adults recognise the connection they need, explore a support network, practise listening with permission and choose a manageable next step. Suitable for community groups, workplace learning and coaching. Suggested group: 6-18 adults, using pairs or triads.

Learning outcomes

Participants can distinguish time alone from feeling lonely; identify a safe support option or a route to finding one; practise permission, reflection and an agreed next step; and make a seven-day connection plan.

What this pack contains

24 editable slides with speaker notes, a six-page participant workbook plus a one-page take-away, and this guide. Slides 1-22 support the timed lesson, slide 23 offers a closing image and slide 24 lists sources. Adults may use fictional examples and pass on any activity.

The central idea

A wider circle can offer more kinds of support. Feeling connected also depends on trust, respect, fit and access. One good connection can matter. There is no required number of friends and no promise that more contact will remove loneliness.

Before people arrive

Facilitator SOP and session running order

Prepare the room

Read the slide notes and this guide. Print workbook pages 1-6 for each participant, with page 7 as a take-away. Provide pens, coloured pencils, A3 paper, a visible timer, drinking water and a quiet space. Use accessible seating, a readable screen and room to leave and rejoin. A co-facilitator is useful for private support.

Prepare support

Identify the local safeguarding lead, relevant health or community services and the emergency pathway. Confirm confidentiality limits and your organisation's procedure before running. Ask about access or language needs without requesting personal histories. Provide the named support route at the start and finish.

Minutes	Focus	Slides
0-8	Welcome, choice and private check-in	1-3
8-18	Sayings, distinctions and connection quality	4-7
18-30	Disconnection pattern and Tariro case	8-10
30-45	Personal support map	11-12
45-50	Optional quiet break	13
50-65	Permission, listening and triad practice	14-16
65-78	Debrief, shared support and barriers	17-20
78-90	Seven-day plan, reflection and close	21-23

The clock

Keep the break. If discussion grows, shorten whole-group reporting, rather than the individual planning or safe closing. Slide 24 is a reference appendix. The agenda adds to 90 minutes.

Choice and care

Agreements to explain aloud

Participation

People may speak, write, draw, use a fictional case, observe or pass. No one must clap, touch, make eye contact, reveal a problem or share a map. Offer written prompts, larger print and more processing time where needed.

Privacy

Ask people to keep others' stories private. Explain that group confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Do not record, photograph worksheets or collect personal maps. People may use initials, roles or symbols and keep their own work.

Limits of confidentiality

Explain your local duties before personal discussion. Serious harm, abuse or safeguarding concerns may require appropriate information sharing. Share only what is necessary, and explain the action to the person wherever possible. Never promise secrecy.

If someone becomes upset

Pause and offer choice: remain, take a quiet break or speak privately with the named support person. Ask what would help. Do not investigate, push for details or turn their experience into group learning. Follow the agreed safeguarding procedure when needed.

When more support is needed

Persistent distress or difficulty with everyday functioning warrants appropriate professional support. Offer help to access it. For immediate danger, use local emergency help and your safeguarding procedure. Keep within your competence and document only what policy requires.

Relationships that feel unsafe

Do not ask someone to reconnect with a person who frightens, controls or harms them. Explore independent specialist support and safety. Do not arrange a joint conversation with the person causing harm.

Common pitfalls

Avoid “just get out more”, forced positivity, measuring success by friend counts, diagnosing loneliness from a score, assuming family is safe, and promising that sharing will fix a problem. Explore practical and structural barriers as well as personal choices.

Welcome and private reflection

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 01 Who is beside you?

WELCOME, 0-3 MINUTES. Welcome people by name when they choose to share it. Explain: Today we will explore the connections that help us feel seen and heard, practise listening, and choose one manageable next step. This is an adult coaching and community learning session, not a treatment group. No one has to share personal difficulties. Use the fictional examples throughout if preferred.

Slide 02 A room with choice

3-5 MINUTES. Read the agreements. Add: Please use first names or initials only on private worksheets. Do not photograph maps or record this session. We ask everyone to respect privacy, but cannot guarantee another participant's behaviour. If serious harm, abuse or safeguarding concerns arise, I may need to involve appropriate support under our local policy. I will explain what I need to do wherever possible. Show the quiet space and name the support lead. Participants may leave and rejoin. Never require physical contact or eye contact.

Slide 03 How connected do I feel today?

5-8 MINUTES. Workbook page 1. Ask for a private mark on a 0-10 line. Then: What helps you feel seen or heard? What would one point higher look like in daily life? Sharing the number is optional. This is a reflection prompt, not a clinical loneliness scale or a diagnostic measure. Do not rank people or interpret a low mark as evidence of risk. Return to the same wording at the end.

Meaning, sayings and evidence

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 04 What we will practise

8-9 MINUTES. Explain the four outcomes. By the end participants should be able to distinguish being alone from feeling lonely, identify one support option or a supported route to finding one, demonstrate permission and reflection, and make a realistic seven-day connection plan. No minimum number of friends or contacts is required.

Slide 05 Old sayings, thoughtful questions

9-12 MINUTES. These are familiar sayings used as discussion prompts, not evidence or rules. Ask: Which saying speaks to you? When might it fail to fit? Reframe the first as interdependence while respecting independence. The hands image is a metaphor for cooperation, not a judgement of physical ability. No clapping or physical demonstration is required. Explain that sharing can change how a burden feels, but does not guarantee a solution or literally halve a problem.

Slide 06 Alone, isolated or lonely?

12-15 MINUTES. Ask for neutral examples, not disclosures. Someone can live alone and feel connected, or have many contacts and still feel lonely. WHO defines social isolation in terms of few roles, relationships and interactions, and loneliness as a distressing mismatch between actual and wanted connection. Solitude wording is a plain-language teaching distinction. Evidence links appear on page 13.

Slide 07 Connection has several dimensions

15-18 MINUTES. WHO describes structure, function and quality as dimensions of connection. Gallup reports links between close workplace friendships and engagement and business outcomes. These findings do not establish that adding people automatically makes someone happier. Ask: Which dimension needs attention for you? The coaching inference for this lesson is to seek manageable, safe support rather than a target contact count. Evidence links appear on page 13.

A small bridge for Tariro

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 08 A possible pattern of disconnection

18-22 MINUTES. Present this as an illustrative coaching pattern, not a universal or validated psychological model. Workbook page 2. Ask: Does any part fit the fictional case or your experience? What else might be going on? Name external barriers too: shift work, language, cost, caring duties, disability, discrimination, transport, loss or unsafe relationships. Do not reduce loneliness to attitude or blame a participant for withdrawing. A smaller step or change in access may help.

Slide 09 Tariro's busy week

22-26 MINUTES. Fictional scenario. Read it once and allow quiet thinking. In pairs, discuss: What do we know? What are we assuming? What might Tariro want: company, understanding, practical help or specialist support? What could make reaching out hard? Avoid diagnosing Tariro, assuming their gender, or prescribing a large social event. Ask participants to suggest a question they would ask Tariro.

Slide 10 The first bridge can be small

26-30 MINUTES. Ask pairs to choose one possible bridge for Tariro. Examples: ask a trusted colleague for a short lunch, reconnect with someone familiar, visit a recurring low-cost group with a host's help, or ask a practitioner to help identify support. Say: You may start with a person, a place or a service. A no or delayed reply is information about that moment, not a measure of your worth. Return to what is within the person's control.

The personal support map

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 11 My support map

30-33 MINUTES. Introduce workbook page 3. This original Sawubona exercise uses three branches around ME, not a score or hierarchy of closeness. People: friend, chosen family, colleague, neighbour. Places: a walking group, community gathering, club, library or online group with good boundaries. Skilled or formal support: GP or local clinician, counsellor, social prescriber where available, safeguarding lead or other appropriate service. No category must be filled. A blank map is not a failure.

Slide 12 A map with room to grow

33-45 MINUTES. Workbook page 3. 5 minutes private mapping, 4 minutes optional pair reflection, 3 minutes whole-group debrief. Use S for supportive, ? for uncertain and B for a boundary needed; symbols accompany colour. Ask: Who listens? Who helps practically? Where can you take part without explaining everything? Which connection drains or frightens you? Keep the last question private. If no safe person comes to mind, offer a private check-in and help find a hosted group or qualified service. Never tell someone to approach an unsafe relative. Participants keep their maps.

Slide 13 Pause

45-50 MINUTES. Announce the return time. Offer a quiet option without conversation. Check privately with anyone who asked for support. Do not infer distress from silence or leaving. Keep a co-facilitator or named support contact available where possible.

Listening with permission

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 14 Permission comes first

50-53 MINUTES. Demonstrate a short opening. Speaker: I have felt a bit disconnected lately. Listener: Thank you for telling me. Is now a good time for a few minutes? Would it help if I listened, or is there another kind of support you want? Ask before giving advice, introducing another person or passing on information, except when safeguarding duties require action. Respect a no. No one owes a disclosure in return for being included.

Slide 15 Sawubona listening

53-56 MINUTES. This four-step sequence is an original facilitation aid for this resource, not an accredited or clinically validated model. Demonstrate: It sounds as though you are carrying a lot and missing someone to talk with. Have I understood? Let the speaker correct you. Avoid fixing, interrogation, forced positivity, making it about yourself, minimising or promising secrecy. Validation recognises their experience without requiring agreement with every belief or action. Agree only a next step that both people can sustain.

Practice and reflection

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 16 Three roles, one conversation

56-65 MINUTES. Each round: 90 seconds speaking and listening, 30 seconds reflecting and checking, 30 seconds observer feedback, 30 seconds rotate. Total 9 minutes. Use a timer and give a 30-second warning. Observer checklist: asked permission; allowed space without interruption; reflected tentatively and checked; asked what support was wanted; respected a pass or boundary. No personal story details in feedback. Everyone may pass, write instead, or observe only. A pair can alternate speaker/listener with private self-observation. Avoid pairing a manager and direct report when choice would feel constrained.

Slide 17 What helped me feel heard?

65-68 MINUTES. Invite learning about process only. Ask participants to name a specific action rather than label a listener good or bad. Examples: You waited, you asked before advising, you checked what I meant. If someone felt exposed, acknowledge it, allow a pause, offer a private check-in and revisit choice. Use workbook page 4 to note one listening habit and one boundary.

Shared support and boundaries

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 18 Sharing the load

68-72 MINUTES. Workbook page 5. Use a mild fictional example: overwhelmed by a house move. Ask what a friend can hear, what a neighbour might help with and what a professional may need to advise on. Let participants keep a real concern unnamed. Shared support can offer perspective, company or practical action, while a problem may require specialist help. Two people or a wider circle can distribute support with consent, but one person should not become everyone's sole support. Do not pass someone's story to a group without their permission.

Slide 19 A healthy boundary protects connection

72-75 MINUTES. Explain role limits. Friends and coaches can support connection but cannot substitute for qualified care. If someone describes persistent distress or difficulty functioning, encourage appropriate professional support and offer help accessing it. If there is immediate danger, use local emergency help and the agreed safeguarding procedure. Do not investigate abuse or promise absolute confidentiality. For unsafe relationships, prioritise safety and independent specialist support rather than a joint discussion with the person causing harm. No helpline numbers are supplied because this resource is intended for local adaptation.

Slide 20 When reaching out feels difficult

75-78 MINUTES. Workbook page 6. Do not insist the barrier is an unhelpful belief. Explore cost, language, transport, discrimination, caring duties, fatigue, disability access and availability. Possible supports include a free venue, quiet hour, accessible transport, translated invitation, phone alternative, a familiar companion or predictable meeting time. A failed attempt is information. An alternative route can be smaller or better supported.

A plan and a respectful close

Step-by-step facilitation notes

Slide 21 One connection in the next seven days

78-85 MINUTES. Workbook page 6. Give 4 minutes to write a plan, 2 minutes optional sharing and 1 minute to refine. Example: On Tuesday I will ask my neighbour whether they would like a 15-minute walk on Saturday. If they are unavailable, I will ask the local group host about joining once. No sending messages during the session is required. Participants choose whether to use a buddy and what may be shared. Do not create a group chat or contact list without explicit consent.

Slide 22 What is different now?

85-90 MINUTES. Return to workbook page 1 and the same 0-10 prompt. Give 1 minute for private reflection, 2 minutes for optional closing words, 1 minute to recap the person's chosen next step and 1 minute to remind people of local support. A change in the score is not proof of impact or treatment. Ask: What is useful even if the number is the same? Offer follow-up with permission. Close: You can choose how connection looks for you. You deserve to be seen and heard.

Slide 23 A place beside you

CLOSING VISUAL within the final 5 minutes. Let this remain on screen as people finish. Invite each person to take their own worksheet. Collect only anonymous feedback if agreed. Do not retain support maps or personal concerns. This original Sawubona resource was developed for Lloyd Munyaviri / L2M Coaching. Visual metaphor and illustration are original to this pack.

Adaptation and follow-through

Keep the learning, adjust the method

One-to-one coaching, 45-60 minutes

Use the check-in, support map, a brief listening practice and connection plan. Let the client choose the topic. Explore what is within their control, what requires access support and whether another service fits better.

Online groups

Invite a private place and headphones where possible. No recording or screenshots. Use paper off camera for mapping, optional cameras and private breakouts. Explain how to contact the facilitator privately. Offer a written or main-room alternative.

Workplaces and leadership

Use a neutral case and voluntary pairs. Avoid manager/direct-report pairings where these inhibit choice. Ask what routines, workloads or access barriers the organisation can change. Friendship does not replace fair treatment or a reasonable workload.

Language, culture and access

Ask what belonging means in the participant's context. Offer a familiar language or interpreter with agreed privacy. A phone call, quiet meeting or shared practical activity may suit better than a large group. Do not assume faith, family, gender, migration status or physical ability determines preferences.

If a map is blank

Say: "We can start with a possible place or service." Offer a supported first introduction, such as speaking with a group host together. Do not ask someone to fill the page or make them responsible for solving a lack of accessible opportunities.

Follow-up after seven days

With prior consent, ask what they tried, what the response was, what helped and what needs to change. A missed attempt or unchanged score calls for curiosity. The next step may involve access support, a different connection, a smaller invitation or professional help. Do not interpret the score as a validated outcome measure.

Facilitator reflection

Did participants have real choice? Did anyone feel pressured to disclose? Did we address barriers as well as behaviour? Did I listen before advising? Is any follow-up required under our agreed support procedure? Collect anonymous process feedback only if participants agree.

Sources and original work

Evidence notes and use of the supplied inspiration

WHO: social connection

Social connection Q&A, 30 June 2025. Supports the distinctions between isolation and loneliness and the structure, function and quality dimensions. [Read the WHO Q&A.](#)

WHO: Commission report

From loneliness to social connection: charting a path to healthier societies, 30 June 2025. Used as background evidence about the importance of connection. [Read the report page.](#)

Gallup: workplace relationships

Alok Patel and Stephanie Plowman, The Increasing Importance of a Best Friend at Work, 16 August 2022, updated 19 January 2024. Reports links with engagement and work outcomes. The lesson does not claim that adding friends causes a set improvement in happiness or performance. [Read the Gallup article.](#)

Supplied inspiration

The Joshua Freedman / Six Seconds illustration and accompanying community post supplied by the user prompted the theme of connection. Their footprint composition, layout, portrait and text are not reproduced. Traditional sayings appear as discussion prompts without claims about their origins.

Original Sawubona material

The support map, fictional Tariro case, listening practice, seven-day plan, diagrams, facilitation sequence and worksheet wording were created for this resource. The four listening steps and disconnection pattern are teaching aids, not validated psychological assessments or accredited models. The cover is an AI-generated conceptual illustration, not a photograph of a real event.

Evidence limits

This is an educational coaching resource. The activities have not been evaluated as a loneliness treatment. The private 0-10 reflection is not a diagnostic instrument. Benefits vary, and safe support may also require changes to services, workplaces and community access.

Credits and attribution

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