



# HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS LONELINESS IN SENIORS



## SCOPE

Healthy Loneliness is funded by the National Agency ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME 2020, with the aim to minimize the negative effects of isolation in health, to increase awareness of loneliness risk factors and provide tips for dialogue and intervention.

This flyer is part of the Healthy Loneliness initiative and aims to support you, a health professional or social caregiver, in the identification of associated factors and strategies to address loneliness, affecting an increasing number of people every year.

## ASPECTS ASSOCIATED WITH LONELINESS

There are multiple factors directly or indirectly associated with loneliness. Check the main ones according to the magnitude of the risk and how to discuss it with your patient.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAILITY

### ANXIETY

Do your worries usually take away the pleasure of your activities on a daily basis? Do you always expect the worst to happen? Do you often have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep? Do you often experience shortness of breath, tremors, a 'lump in your throat' or tightness in your chest?

### DEPRESSION

Do you often feel emptiness, sadness, hopelessness and/or feel unmotivated with life? Have you been decreasing most of your daily activities due to a lack of interest?

Vital events (natural or accidental crises)

Have you recently lost a loved one or something very important to you?

### SELF-EFFICACY

Do you feel able to deal with bad emotions and life's obstacles?

### VITAL EVENTS (NATURAL OR ACCIDENTAL CRISES)

Have you recently lost a loved one or something very important to you?

## SOCIAL FRAILITY

### SOCIAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Do you live alone? If not, are you satisfied with the relationships you have with the people you live with and with your community? Are you engaged with social activities? Do you often experience situations of violence at home?

### INCOME

Do you face financial difficulties that jeopardize your livelihood?

### HEALTH LITERACY

Do you know how to stay healthy or, if applicable, how to better deal with health problems? Do you know where and how to seek services for your health problems?

### DIGITAL LITERACY

Do you use any device, such as a cellphone, notebook or tablet, to communicate with people or to entertain yourself?

Do you know how to use these technical devices?

### INFORMATION LITERACY

Do you consider yourself to be "in tune" with current events? Do you know how to look for general information that is useful to you on a day-to-day basis?

## PHYSICAL FRAILITY

### AUTONOMY

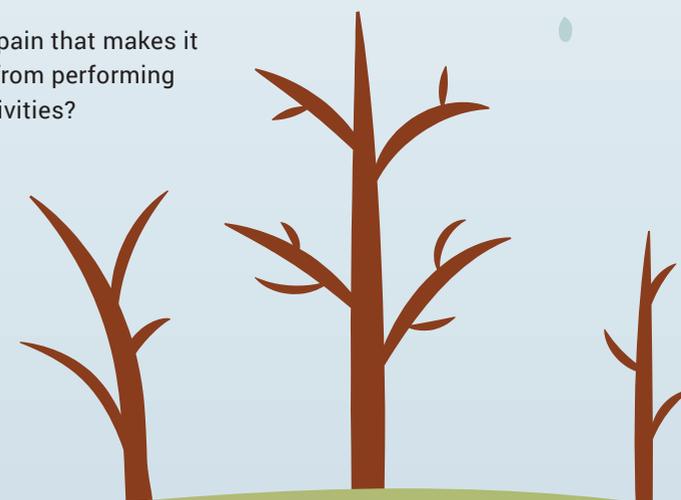
Because of your health or physical condition, have you stopped doing everyday activities such as going to the market, managing your money and/or household chores?

### MOTOR, VISUAL AND AUDITORY ABILITIES

Do you have vision, mobility and/or hearing problems impairing you from performing daily activities?

### CHRONIC PAIN

Do you often experience pain that makes it difficult or prevents you from performing and/or enjoying daily activities?



## LIFESTYLE

### ☁️ PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Do you consider having a sedentary life? Do you regularly physically exercise?

Level of leisure and entertainment activities

Do you often perform activities generating great pleasure and focus at the same time?

### ☁️ LEVEL OF LEISURE AND ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVITIES

Do you often perform activities generating great pleasure and focus at the same time?

### ☁️ HEALTH CARE SERVICE UTILIZATION

Is your client a major consumer of health appointments with nonspecific symptoms?

Does your client not show up for screening appointments or other appointments?

## ENGAGEMENT

### ☁️ SPIRITUALITY

Are you a follower of religious or spiritual activities? Do you feel connected to something bigger than your existence as a human being?

### ☁️ LIFE PURPOSE

Do you consider yourself to have a purpose in life, i.e., a greater reason to live despite what life can bring you in terms of distress?

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH LONELINESS



Explain to the patient the importance of mental health care and refer him/her to psychological and/or psychiatric care in case of psychological distress;

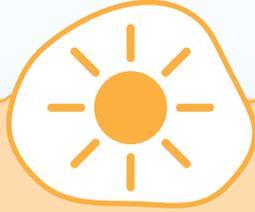
Teach mindfulness techniques or refer the patient to a service that offers this type of practice;

Refer a patient to a social or income transfer program when needed;

### ENCOURAGE SENIORS:

- adopt a pet or interact with nature through outdoor activities;
- talk to friends and family about negative emotions and thoughts;
- use technology (video call, phone call, social media, etc.) to interact with friends and relatives.





Identify the governmental or non-governmental social support services to the elderly in your practice area for referral;

Ask the patient what he believes would be a solution to his social isolation and loneliness;

Point out leisure activities for seniors in the community that target different abilities (such as motor, cognitive and artistic) at the same time. Examples of such activities are crafts, sports and gardening. Suggesting an activity that is of interest to the patient is important;

Search computer courses or equivalent ones to suggest the patient improve digital skills;

#### ADVISE THE SENIOR TO:

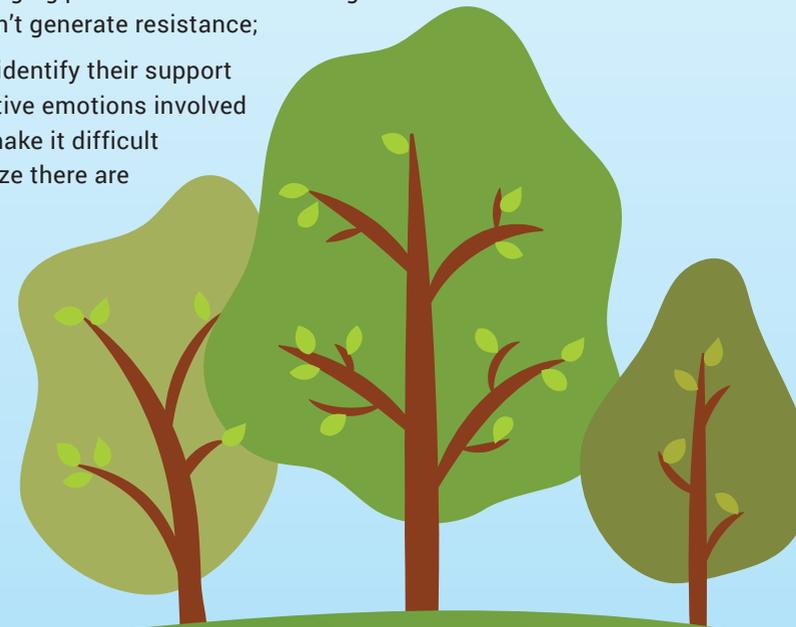
- ask professionals questions about his/her health;
- talk to people who have the same health problems to understand how they deal with daily health care;
- ask for guidance from family members or friends on how to surf the internet for entertainment and self-education;
- keep in touch with different people to expand knowledge and stay updated;
- join a group that performs spiritual/religious practices according to his/her interests and beliefs;
- place on the daily agenda spiritual and religious practices.

## ACCEPTANCE APPROACH TO LONELY SENIORS

In order to accept and seek help, patients need to know what to do, believe in their capability, and take co-responsibility in the process of coping with loneliness.

The steps to develop a patient's self-efficacy may be described as follows:

- Listen to the hidden motivations that lead the patient not to practice healthy habits;
- Identify and assist the patient to manage obstacles related to behavior change toward healthier habits;
- Encourage the patient to make these changes. Use reinforcing words and seek the patients' memories of overcoming for self-motivation;
- Prefer to use open-ended questions such as "how do you feel when you are alone?" instead of "do you feel lonely?";
- Listen to the answers that indicate the experience of loneliness and rephrase them so the patient can "hear" and perceive himself/herself in this condition;
- Identify discrepancies between the patient's wills and actual attitudes;
- Prefer an encouraging position to a commanding position so it doesn't generate resistance;
- Help the patient identify their support network. The negative emotions involved in loneliness can make it difficult for him/her to realize there are supporting people.



# SCREENING OF LONELINESS

The following scale includes three questions that measure dimensions of loneliness. The questions and the instructions for its application are described below:

The questions below are related to how you feel about different aspects of your life. For each one, please tell me how many times you feel this way.

1. Firstly, how often do you feel you have no companionship?

- almost never
- sometimes
- often

2. How often do you feel excluded?

- almost never
- sometimes
- often

3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

- almost never
- sometimes
- often

The final score is obtained with the sum of all items, with the value of each answer option as follows: almost never (1); sometimes (2); often (3). The score, therefore, ranges from 3 to 9, with the cutoff point for identifying loneliness being > 5.

## STAKEHOLDERS



**LAS NAVES**



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

