

On Dealing With Loneliness

Loneliness is a common emotion that should not be diminished, as everyone experiences it. Being students ourselves, we are aware of how lonely university life can be, especially for International students during these turbulent times. Having conducted a survey regarding loneliness that was distributed via Social Media platforms to TiU students, we currently have a better understanding of what students are looking for in terms of help. Below you will find a general overview of loneliness, its types and resources that can be of help.

On the current scientific understanding of Loneliness

Even though there has been a lot of research on loneliness, we still know so little about its concept. However, one thing researchers agree on is that loneliness often occurs when personal relationships are disrupted, something which frequently happens when transitioning on to adulthood. This transition often goes hand in hand with going to university. **Students are expected to maintain old relationships and create new ones at the same time in an unknown environment, which can easily cause distress and a sense of loneliness.**

Therefore, it is not so weird to feel lonely from time to time during this transition; in fact, **temporary loneliness is quite normal.** However, it is **important to distinguish between different types of loneliness** in order to find out **what you can do to help you deal with these feelings.**

The main types of loneliness are **social loneliness** and **emotional loneliness.** Whereas social loneliness refers to lacking social contacts and being part of a group, emotional loneliness emphasizes missing intimate relationships and emotional attachment. Therefore, it could be the case that you have many social contacts, but not someone you feel comfortable to share your deepest thoughts with. On the other hand, it could also happen that you have many friends scattered around that you feel close and emotionally attached to, but you still miss being part of a group of friends that hangs out together.

In the next section, tips from experts will be provided. After that, you will get an idea regarding which **practical resources** are available for these different types of loneliness mainly in the **Netherlands and Tilburg.**

Tips from experts

Understanding which types of loneliness exist, can help you conquer them. In that process, a first step could be to try some things out yourself. Think about growing a feeling of acceptance, talking about the subject, and adding various activities to your routine. For directly usable tips, we have put together a list of some of the best advice of various experts.

It's okay!

You might feel like there is a stigma attached to loneliness, and if so you're not the only one. Let's face that stigma together! Everyone can feel lonely from time to time, and it is truly important to discuss those feelings. We can break the stigma together by:

- ◇ Take some time to acknowledge feelings, but do not let them play a main role in your everyday life. Besides, you are definitely not the only one!
- ◇ Thinking about it this way: loneliness is like thirst, according to Dr. [Gerine Lodder](#) PhD. It is a warning sign, just like thirst is. If you do not have any water yourself, you should never be embarrassed to ask for it. In other words, do not be scared or embarrassed to share it with people you feel safe with. This could be friends, family, or a psychologist. Moreover, speaking up will allow your environment to help you, and will make you feel better in the end.

Think and talk about it

This can be done in several ways. Give it a chance, and discover what works for you!

With yourself

- ◇ Try keeping a journal for a week. What makes you feel happy and what might be triggering your feelings of loneliness? What are you exactly missing?
- ◇ Why do you think that is? Where does the feeling come from (e.g. the news, social media)? Is it justified? What can you do to limit the exposure to these sources if they are making you feel stressed?
- ◇ Set a weekly goal, like calling an old friend or inviting someone out for a nice activity. Be proud of yourself if you make it happen even if it does not turn out the way you expected! And if you do not? You can definitely do great another time.

With friends and family

- ◇ If you have a good and comfortable relationship with them, Keep in touch, about the positives and the negatives. Everybody has something going on from time to time, and usually close ones enjoy exchanging experiences and care.
- ◇ If you do not have a nice relationship with family and do not feel close enough to any friend, do not feel hopeless. Everyday is an opportunity to create new connections and if you feel hard to connect with people, under the Interventions by Need section you may find an opportunity to engage in a suitable activity that can help you.

With people you do not know

- ◇ Chat with fellow students or people in your gym class for example, the most interesting conversations can arise from where you least expect it!
- ◇ If you sense something is wrong with someone, ask them kindly or in extreme cases inform the dean of students: studentendecaan@tilburguniversity.edu.
- ◇ Try an anonymous chat or call, like [Ease](#) or [Alles Oké? \(Everything Okay?\)](#).

Build your own routine!

Having a routine that incorporates meaningful and nice activities may make you feel more structured and better able to self-regulate. Tips to do so are:

- ◇ Wake up and go to sleep at about the same time every day, it may help you to self-regulate better.
- ◇ Exercise regularly. A half an hour stretch, for example, is already better than nothing. On top of that, you could join a [sports association](#).
- ◇ You could join a [study or student association](#), or try [volunteering](#).
- ◇ Make sure you take enough time for yourself to relieve stress and relax. This can be through a walk, [meditation](#), [relaxing music](#), or for example a [podcast](#). Watch [this video](#) for tips (English subtitles)!
- ◇ Try the 8+8+8 rule; 8 hours of working or studying, 8 hours of doing leisure activities and relaxing and 8 hours of sleep.

Since everyone is different, there are countless personal preferences. That is why the final tip is to try multiple things. This way, you will find out what suits you best! This also applies to the interventions below.

Interventions by need

Looking for an opportunity to have a talk with someone new?

Frisse Gedachtes and TiU Connects

A Dutch student movement that aims at improving student well-being. The services are offered in both Dutch and English.

What do they offer?

- ◇ An online chat with a Buddy from Frisse Gedachtes.
- ◇ A connection opportunity through matching you with another student to have a walk in your city through the project Frisse Gedachtes Walks. In Tilburg there is the TiU Walks, organized by TiU Connects!

How do I find them?

- ◇ Frisse Gedachtes: <https://en.frissegedachtes.nl/>
- ◇ TiU Connects: <https://sites.google.com/view/tilburg/homepage>

International Center Tilburg

An institution that focuses on supporting internationals feeling more at home in Tilburg.

What do they offer and where to find them?

- ◇ Listening Ear project: A trusted environment for you to have any conversation and express your feelings with a volunteer.
- ◇ A free session of 45 minutes can be booked by registration on their website: <https://www.ictilburg.com/listening-ear>.

Looking for professional help?

There are many ways to connect with professionals that are surely of great help when dealing with feelings of loneliness and other hardships. To facilitate students and mainly internationals to find a psychologist/therapist, here are some of the options that you may find interesting to connect with a professional of your choice. There are both free and paid options outlined which will hopefully help you find a good match to your specific situation.

Resources in Tilburg

International Center Tilburg

An institution that focuses on supporting internationals feeling more at home in Tilburg.

What do they offer and where to find them?

- ◇ A free session of 45 minutes with a certified psychologist can be booked by registration in their website: <https://www.ictilburg.com/listening-ear>

Psychology Bureau (MSc Marina Pacini)

A private practice that offers individual therapy located in Tilburg. MSc Marina Pacini speaks Spanish, Catalan, Italian and English and works as a healthcare psychologist using a combination of different models such as *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)* and *Problem Solving Brief Therapy Model (PSBT)*. She also provides counseling in the International Center Tilburg and OpenUp.

Where to find her?

- ◇ At Psychology Bureau: <https://www.psychologybureau.com/home-1>
- ◇ At OpenUp: <https://openup.com/team/marina-pacini/>

Resources available online

OpenUp

A Dutch based platform that provides direct access to certified psychologists. A session can be easily booked by their website and currently in seven different languages (English, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, French, and Mandarin)

Where to find them?

- ◇ OpenUp Website: <https://openup.com/>

Better Help

The world's largest therapy platform offers direct contact to licensed accredited psychologists, marriage and family therapists, clinical social workers, and board licensed professional counselors.

Where to find them?

- ◇ BetterHelp Website: <https://www.betterhelp.com/>

The Expat Psychologists

This platform offers you to contact certified psychologists specialized in the special and challenging situation of being an expat, that means, a person who lives outside their native country. A session can be booked in various languages and also in Dutch for natives living outside the Netherlands.

Where to find them?

- ◇ The Expat Psychologists Website: <https://www.the-expat-psychologist.nl/>

International Therapist Directory

A platform to help you connect with over 300 professionals counselors and therapists in over 40 countries around the world and online.

Where to find them?

- ◇ International Therapist Directory Website: <https://internationaltherapistdirectory.com/>

Looking for connection with a group?

International Center Tilburg

An institution that focuses on supporting internationals feeling more at home in Tilburg.

What do they offer?

- ◇ A meeting, study or work place in their cafe (consumption not required!)
- ◇ Various fun events which can include dinners, films, spontaneous get-togethers, drinks, stand-up comedy nights, workshops, museum trips, game nights, and more! Certainly a great way to sparkle new connections! Have a look at the schedule on their website for more information.

Where to find them?

- ◇ International Center Tilburg Website: <https://www.ictilburg.com/>

Tilburg University Chaplaincy

The University Chaplaincy welcomes all students independent of their background. It is a community to help you give space to parts of your humanity that tend to be overlooked by providing a variety of opportunities to meet others at their organized evenings or events. Have a look on their website to see the full scope of activities they provide and to evaluate whether it fits your needs!

Where to find them?

- ◇ Chaplaincy website:
<https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/students/tutoring/pastoralcare/student-chaplaincy>

Red Cross

This institution's main goal is to help people in need. They have the biggest voluntary aid network in the world and the Dutch branch dates back to over 150 years ago. In Tilburg you can find them in the Studentdesk Tilburg which focuses on making students aware of first aid, emergency situations and humanitarian law. You can become a committee member, a flex volunteer, or apply for a board year!

Where to find them?

- ◇ Rode Kruis' Studentdesk Tilburg Website:
<https://afdeling.rodekruis.nl/studentendesk-tilburg/>

Uni-Life App

Tilburg University collaborates with Uni-Life, an app that offers an up-to-date overview of the events organized by study and student associations and Tilburg University itself. Keep abreast of coming events, explore the various associations and organizers, and get to know your fellow students better – even in corona times. Get more information in the Tilburg University page dedicated to this project!

What do they offer?

- ◇ Special community pages enabling you to contact other students with similar interests
- ◇ A meet-up feature to arrange an activity with a fellow student
- ◇ Event calendar

Where do I find them?

- ◇ Information page from the Tilburg University Site:
<https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/students/uni-life-en>

Expatriate Groups

Expatriate groups are communities you can find online that provide a possibility of connection with other expats through online groups or organized events. If you are interested in this possibility, surf around the internet with the key word 'expatriate group Netherlands' and get involved with what matches you most!

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Psychology Bureau: <https://www.psychologybureau.com/home-1>

OpenUp with Marina Pacini: <https://openup.com/team/marina-pacini/>

OpenUp: <https://openup.com/>

BetterHelp: <https://www.betterhelp.com/>

The Expat Psychologists: <https://www.the-expat-psychologist.nl/>

International Therapist Directory: <https://internationaltherapistdirectory.com/>

International Center Tilburg: <https://www.ictilburg.com/>

Chaplaincy:

<https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/students/tutoring/pastoralcare/student-chaplaincy>

Rode Kruis Studentdesk Tilburg: <https://afdeling.rodekruis.nl/studentendesk-tilburg/>

Tilburg University: <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/students/uni-life-en>