

'People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges'

– Joseph Newton –

1 *Recognise your thinking distortions. When your mood is low there is a tendency for your thinking to become distorted (all-or-nothing, exaggerated, etc). Note the following common thoughts associated with loneliness and identify thinking distortions: 'I have no friends', 'No one likes or loves me', 'What good am I to anybody?', 'Nobody understands me', 'I need to be loved', 'I am boring.'*

2 *Stop comparing yourself with others. Again look out for thinking distortions, 'Everyone is busier and happier than me', 'Everybody else has fulfilling relationships'. You have an idealised fantasy about other people's lives which means that there is no way your own life will match up.*

3 *Recognise the vicious spiral of low mood, and how it has led to you withdrawing from other people because of your fear of hurt and rejection. Turn this process around and start approaching others rather than avoiding. Plan activities that increase your social contacts. Contact people you know and like. Talk to neighbours. Develop a hobby.*

4 *Recognise the difference between being alone and loneliness. Don't equate alone with loneliness. Learn to enjoy doing things and caring for yourself on your own. Cook yourself a nice meal, play your favourite music, read a good book. The more you can feel at home with yourself – not looking around for others all the time – the more attractive a person you will become. People who have found happiness in themselves are often the most desired.*

5 *Plan a variety of activities to do on your own (eg, go to an art gallery or walk in the park). Before you carry out the activity draw up a chart and rate how satisfying you think it will be on a scale of 0 to 100 (0 = no satisfaction, 100 = enormous satisfaction). Then, after you've carried out the activity, rate the actual satisfaction.*

6 *List some advantages of being alone, starting with, 'It provides an opportunity to explore how I really feel and think'; 'It allows me to develop personal strength'.*
