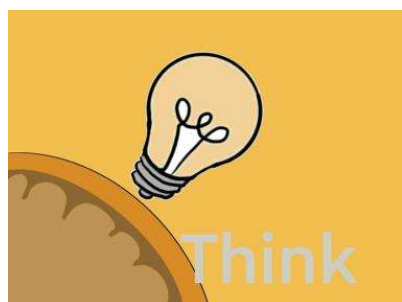


# Loneliness

Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Some of us may prefer to spend time alone and we may thrive without the need for much social contact. Loneliness is a negative feeling of not having intimacy and not having the relationships that we desire. Loneliness is associated with depression, anxiety and cardiovascular risk. You can be part of a social group or family and still experience loneliness because you feel misunderstood or not cared about by the people around you.



Autistic people may lack confidence in social situations because of their previous and ongoing experience of stigma, discrimination and exclusion. Being excluded because you are different reduces opportunities for connecting with people and increases the likelihood of feeling lonely. Autistic people often mask their autism in order to reduce stigma and discrimination and take part in social activities. When an Autistic person has to mask in this way, it comes at a cost to mental health and can be exhausting.



Autistic people often communicate and socialise differently to non-autistic people, using different body language, facial expressions and patterns of speech. As a result, their way of being in social situations may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by non-autistic people. Autistic people also experience sensory processing differences that can make certain social situations difficult to take part in. These barriers to inclusion and participation mean that Autistic people may have few opportunities for rewarding social contact and, as a result, experience higher levels of loneliness than their non-autistic peers.



Deepening your understanding of what it is like to be Autistic and sharing this with your family, friends and colleagues may help to create openings for the Autistic people you know to experience rewarding social and emotional connection. Autistic people have so much to offer. By modifying your way of being in the world, you can reduce the need for Autistic people to mask and thereby create social and emotional openings that may reduce their experience of loneliness.