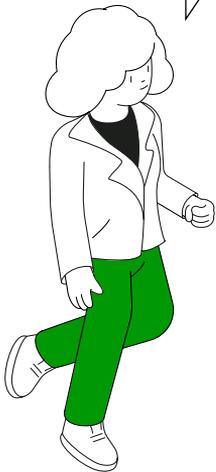


Katrina's story:

Finding an outlet for your feelings is healthy

Katrina is 36 and lives in a small town in the east of England. She cares for her autistic 15-year-old daughter, and for her partner who lives with ongoing pain and mobility issues following the botched treatment of a knee injury. She works part time and is responsible for her family and a lively dog. While Katrina is rarely alone, she feels lonely as she has no one to share her burdens with:

"My partner can't take regular work, so I get up and go out and work and earn my salary. I have feelings that I'm carrying a burden on my shoulders. I live around some difficult circumstances and cope with health issues that nobody else really understands. That in itself makes you feel quite lonely because finding someone who 'gets it' and that you can talk to is not easy."



The loneliness affects her deeply:

"Loneliness is horrible. It makes you feel vulnerable. It makes you feel anxious."

"At times, [...] a bad day at home, [when] the burden on your shoulders is very heavy, and you feel down in yourself, the picking yourself up thing to get on with it and go to work and be around people who don't know and don't understand is extremely difficult."

Katrina's partner is on strong medication that can affect his mood. He is in pain and distress as a result of his medical issues. Their relationship has changed as a result:

"Having a proper partner who is on your wavelength all the time, who you can share things with 50-50. [...] Someone who is so in tune with you that life is a joy. That's what I miss. He's a great fella, but he's not in tune with me because he's got so many internal battles within his body that he's on another planet sometimes."

Katrina's responsibilities mean that she doesn't have time to keep up with friends:

"Home life takes over. You find yourself having to earn a salary [...] And then I come home, I walk the dogs [...] Then I come back and [...] Daughter will be home. I need to talk to her about her day, debrief, and find out how she was at college. Then it comes to tea time, and then it's like 'what are we going to have for tea?' [...] Then I remember to look at the paperwork, look at the bills, all that stuff. And then I'm usually exhausted by eight o'clock."

She has one friend in similar circumstances and really values this relationship:

"Her husband has extreme ill health. We do, both of us, value it immensely when we do catch up and meet up and put the world to rights. We both feel better for it. But, again, [...] we don't meet up every week by any means."

Katrina's daughter helped her realise that she needed more support. She is now in touch with a social prescribing link worker who helped her get a carers' assessment and has suggested relationship support to help Katrina and her partner communicate better. This has made a difference:

"I think, oh, actually, perhaps there is a bit of hope."

Katrina also got some funding for a hypnotherapy course, which she finds helpful in managing her feelings of loneliness:

"She certainly has made me feel better since I've been going, and has given me hypnotherapy for some situations, like stress, sleep and things like that. The last session that I had with her was about letting go of difficult feelings. I'm hoping that there will be something really positive by the time that I've run the course of sessions with her."

While Katrina believes that it's important not to bottle up feelings of loneliness, stigma can be a barrier to talking about it:

"Keeping it in doesn't help when you feel lonely. The first step is realising your feelings. The second step is trying to not keep the feelings within you. Find something that works for you to let the feelings out, because if you keep them in you run the risk of them turning sour within you."

"I do think English stiff upper lip can be our downfall at times and that's the way we are. Talking about loneliness, there's probably in society a bit of a stigma with it."