

I know I get grumpy sometimes, and people being nice to me can make me even grumpier. But my friends let me be myself, even if I am grumpy.

But things can go wrong, too. We can argue, and sometimes say nasty things about each other. It can start as a joke, but then it goes wrong. I feel a mixture of anger and loneliness.

I feel like I don't belong, even if we're all together in the same class. It's strange, being lonely when there are lots of people around, but it happens.

The other difficult time is when I've not seen some friends for a while – like in the long holidays. I lose my confidence and am nervous of contacting them. I think they won't want to see me again, and I end up feeling lonely.”

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT LONELINESS?



“It feels as if a million people are telling you that you have no friends. It feels as if I am not alive. Nothing’s worth it.”

“I said before that loneliness is strange – when it stops, it’s gone completely and you don’t feel it at all. So it’s hard to say how loneliness affects me. It feels bad – I know that. It feels sad, too, when you are being ignored. You start to think about all the bad things. Even if it’s just a couple of friends ignoring you, it feels as if a million people are telling you that you have no friends.

At school, when I'm lonely and with other people I feel as if I can't be myself – because people will judge me. I feel much more sensitive and, to be honest, I don't really like myself when I'm lonely. I feel lost and cut off from people and I'm nervous about doing anything. It's worse if I'm hiding some kind of secret from people.

I worry about myself, and worry about what I do. It feels as if nobody knows who I am, and I don't know myself. It's like I'm not really living, just existing. I feel completely useless.

That's a bit unfair. I know I'm okay. Like I say, I know my family loves me and everything. I even know I'll stop feeling lonely sometime soon. But right in the middle of it, nothing's worth it."

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT LONELINESS?



“My dog Bonny likes me, whatever
sort of mood I’m in.”

“**Y**ou probably think I’m really weird, and lonely all the time. I’m not, but I thought I should tell you what it’s like. Maybe you feel the same, or maybe it’s different. Anyway, I’m only telling you because I think there are some ways that I can help myself feel better when I’m lonely. There are some things that other people do that can help, too. And there’s always my dog, Bonny.

Bonny’s great. A big old dog, a bit like a Labrador, she’s a few months older than me. And she just likes me, whatever sort of mood I’m in. I get to take her out at the weekends, and sometimes when the whole family goes for a long walk she’ll tag along with me. Bonny is definitely the best cure for loneliness. She doesn’t go ‘aw, there, there’, which makes me

even grumpier. I'm glad dogs don't talk. Bonny just seems to know that I'd probably like to scratch her ears, and then she snuggles up beside me.

I started reading recently. I've been reading for years at school of course. But I got into this series of books – horror-type things – and suddenly it's like I've got the bug. A nice boring Sunday is great for reading. When I'm in the middle of being lonely, I won't talk to people about it. (I sometimes tell Bonny, but that's different.) But I get into a book and I'm taken away to a different place. I'm with the people in the book – really with them, not just reading about them. I can't be lonely there – even when horrible things are happening in the book.”

“I like long journeys, in a car or a bus or a train. It feels as if no one is judging me and I can just read or watch something out of the window. I don’t know why, but I’m never lonely when I’m travelling like that. It’s different if I’m waiting around in a station, but while I’m travelling I see everything flying by without having to make any effort. So there’s no room for loneliness.

It’s the same when I go on long walks, especially in the countryside, or when I’m climbing hills. Sometimes I go on bike rides, and that’s good too. Nobody can get into a conversation when you’re riding along, and you just hear the wind whistle past your ears. My friend goes skateboarding and that’s probably good as well.

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT LONELINESS?



“My room is usually the best place to be when I’m lonely, especially for the hour or so before I go to sleep.”

My room's usually the best place to be when I'm lonely, and I often go there when I'm in a bad mood. It's funny, because when I was little I used to get sent to my room when I was naughty, but I really enjoyed it. There, I've got my computer games to play and I can relax, especially if I've managed to finish a lot of homework.

Best of all is the hour or so before I go to sleep. Everyone else in the house is busy or already asleep. Nobody bothers me, and no one is shouting at me. For me, it's a calming down hour. I don't need to do anything but close my eyes and sleep."

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT LONELINESS?



“Listening to music can cheer me up.”

“I like a lot of music, and am always wearing headphones when I can. In my room, I’ll play my music loud and have something to drink. Listening to music, I don’t have those horrible lonely conversations with myself when I’m telling myself how useless I am. I really listen, and try to learn the words. I like the old music that my granddad liked. They played some from the ’70s at his funeral, and I still listen to that. I like listening with headphones because only I can hear it. My own time and my own music. That’s a really good way to be on my own.

Music has different moods, and that’s good for me. Sad music can cheer me up. Strange, isn’t it? Really good, sad music is telling me it’s okay to be sad or lonely sometimes. And that helps me feel better. But I’ll also play

really happy music that's good for dancing to, and I can't help smiling. Music has got lots of emotions in it. It can sing what you're feeling.

I was never very good at painting, but I like drawing – really complicated, detailed, drawings, sometimes copied from books. When I'm drawing, I concentrate really hard on what I'm doing and that means I don't concentrate on my worries. I'm there, on the paper, as if I'm drawing my own escape. Everyone says I stick my tongue out when I'm concentrating, and I'm always like that when I'm drawing.

Quite a few of my friends are into sport. I think they get the same things out of sport that I get from music and drawing. I've never been that good at sport, but I can see why they like it.”

“**I**n lessons, I’m not often lonely, but there’s a lot that happens that can create loneliness later. The most important thing is that I don’t like it when the class messes around. I know teachers don’t like it, but my friends don’t like it and I don’t either. It gives me a headache, and people say things that are hurtful and nasty. I know that I sometimes mess about too, but I’d rather be working – doing work that makes sense and that’s a real challenge. I want work that’s a bit difficult. Not impossible, but difficult.

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT LONELINESS?



“I don’t like it when we’re allowed to mess around. The best lessons are those I concentrate in and that gives me things to learn, which means I forget about loneliness.”

The lessons that are best are the ones where I have to concentrate, like art and when we're reading. Those lessons give me things to think about. That means that I don't get bored and don't have space in my head to get lonely. And if the teachers keep control of the class, then I don't get people saying nasty things about me. The sort of nasty things that get said send me into a bad mood and make it lonely at lunch or in between lessons.

It's good if the teacher gives me things to research in the library or at home. If they give me interesting things to learn, in lessons and outside lessons, that will get me away from loneliness, even if I've got no friends to play with."



“Teachers can give us stuff that we can disappear into, like drawing. Then we won’t be so lonely outside lessons.”

“**T**eachers can help outside lessons too. I said I like drawing at home, and what started me off was a lesson in school. We were asked to do a ‘close observation’ drawing of a plant, really zooming in on a simple flower. I lost myself in the drawing. Ever since then I’ve loved drawing at any time.

I like reading now, too. In English, it would be great to be reading a book that I could choose for myself and I could carry on reading at home. The same goes for music lessons. Let us listen to music we like ourselves, sometimes, and create our own playlists for the lessons.

I'm sure others have their own favourite activities. Teachers just need to work out what they are and give us stuff that we can disappear into. Then we won't be so lonely outside lessons. We'll be thinking about things, or going to the library to read, or asking to carry on drawing after the lesson ends.

More lunchtime clubs and homework clubs would be good too, so we don't have to risk the playground when we've fallen out with our friends, and we don't have to go home to a lonely, empty house.