GL GRIEFLINE

ADDRESSING LONELINESS

in the Workplace

TrackSAFE Foundation
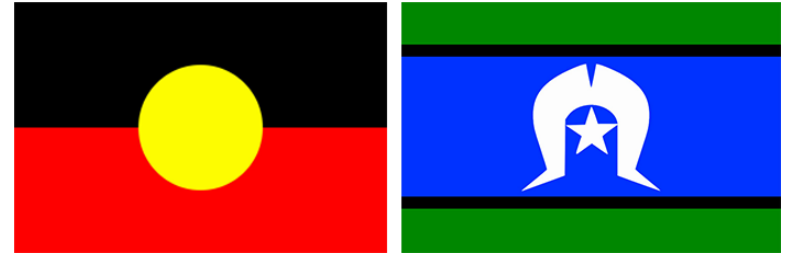
Acknowledgement of Country

Griefline recognises the continuous and deep connection to Country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples of this nation. In this way we respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of our Country throughout Australia.

We pay tribute to their Elders and leaders past, present and emerging, and their continuous and ongoing connection to land, waterways, sea, sky and wind.

We acknowledge their displacement, disconnection and grief caused by colonisation, and recognise their resilience and generosity of spirit as we begin the process of reconciliation and healing.

We acknowledge this land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

About Griefline

National not for profit supporting the community for 30+ years

Support people experiencing loss, grief and loneliness

We want to change the way people think and talk about grief

Part 1: Understanding Loneliness

What is your perception of loneliness?

How have you witnessed loneliness in your workplace?

Share your thoughts in the chat box.

'Feeling lonely does not always mean being alone just as being alone does not always mean feeling alone. A person can feel lonely in a marriage or in a huge crowd.'

J. T. Cacioppo et al., 2009

Definition of loneliness

"Loneliness is the absence or perceived absence of satisfying social relationships, accompanied by stress and psychological distress because of this lack of relationships.

People who are lonely experience powerful feelings of emptiness and isolation."

Leutenberg, 2015

Definition of social isolation

"It's a compromise between loneliness and "aloneness" dependent on whether choice is involved."

Kileen 1998 (as cited in Costello, 1999)

Loneliness in Australia

➢ Four in ten (44%) of Australians regularly feel lonely

➢ More than half of all Australians (54%) feel they lack companionship

➢ One in four Australians (24%) say they don't have people they can regularly talk or turn to

➢ Almost two in three Australians (63%) say they regularly feel isolated from others
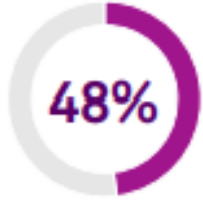
48% 1 in 2 Australians say that **when they feel lonely they are too embarrassed to admit that to others**
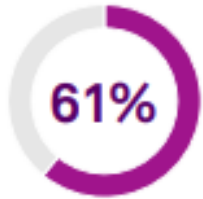
61% Six in ten Australians say that **when they feel lonely they do not talk to others about it**

60% Six in ten Australians say they can **recognise if friends or loved ones are lonely, with women more likely to agree with this sentiment compared to men (65%** compared to **56%)**

Australians in **rural regions** who feel lonely are **almost twice as likely** as Australians in **inner metro areas** to say they do not do anything to combat feelings of loneliness
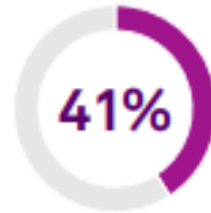
1 in 2 Australians say that **when they feel lonely they are too embarrassed to admit that to others**

Loneliness in Australia - breaking down the stigma

Two in five Australians say they are **worried others will think there is something wrong with them** if they say they are lonely
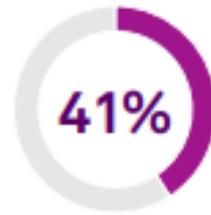
41% Two in five Australians agree that they **worry others will judge them** if they say they are lonely

41% Two in five Australians say they are **worried others will think there is something wrong with them if they say they are lonely**
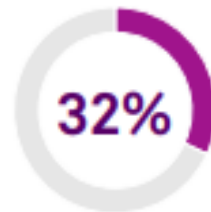
32% One third of Australians say that **when they feel lonely they feel ashamed about it**

Loneliness in older people

Older adults are at increased risk of loneliness and/or social isolation.

They often are suffering from chronic illness, live alone, are dealing with the loss of family or friends.

Loneliness in younger people

Young people (16-24) experience a heightened risk of loneliness.
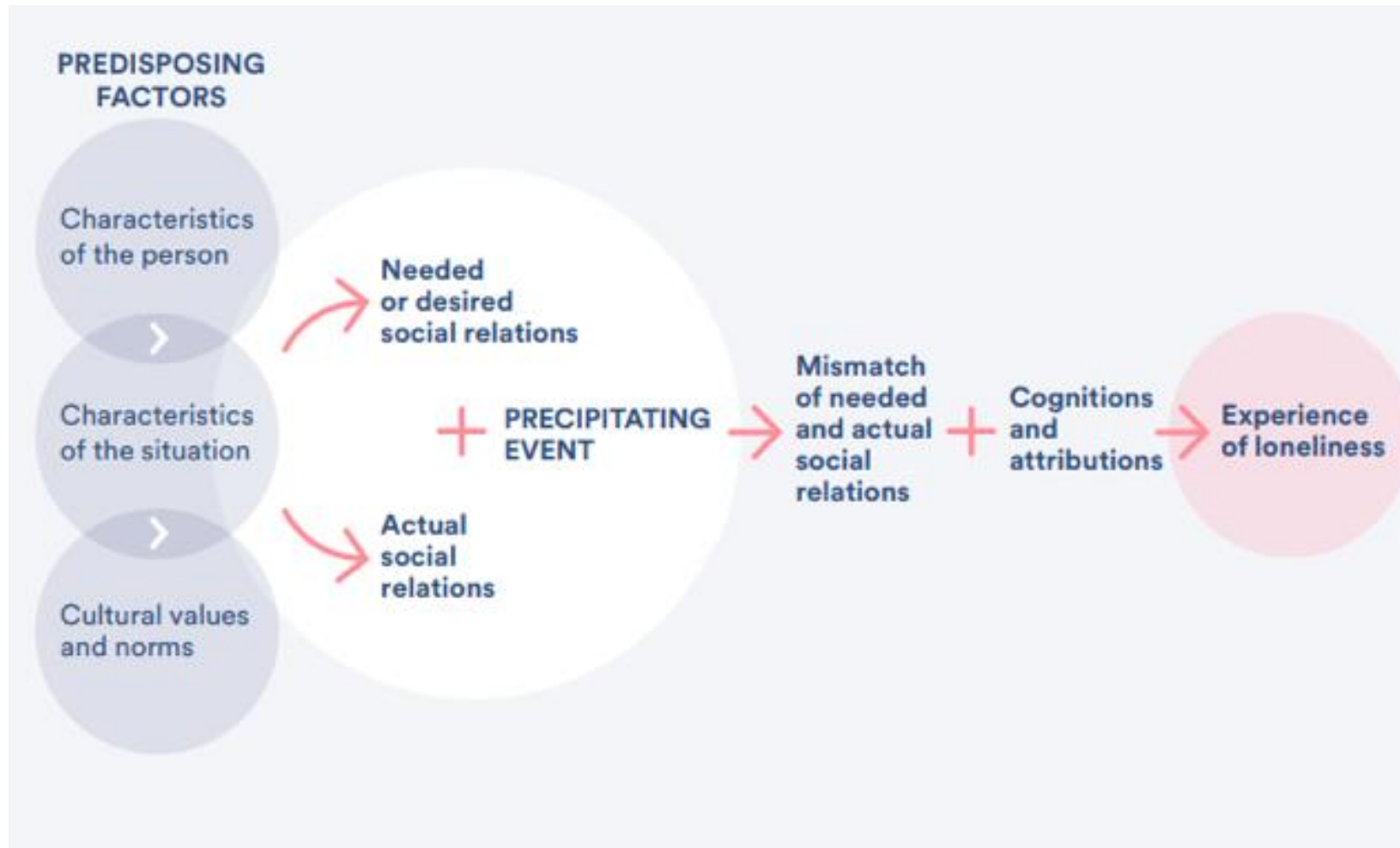
Loneliness in other groups

Men are more likely to be socially isolated than women

US reports show that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people face a heightened risk of social isolation

Source: Klinenberg E. (2016).

Model for the cause of loneliness

Source: The Psychology of Loneliness: Why it matters and what we can do, 2020

Situational characteristics

Social factors,
living arrangements, health,
abilities, stage of life.

For these reasons, loneliness
can affect **anyone**.

Situational

- Bereavement and widowhood
- Recent divorce or separation
- Living with psychiatric disorders
- Poor or declining physical health
- Limited mobility
- Limited ability to communicate
- Children moving out of home
- Retirement
- People living with a disability

- Unemployment
- Financial problems
- Single parents
- Moving out of home/starting university
- Living alone
- Migrant background
- Non-English speaking
- Enforced isolation (pandemic)
- Being a carer

How does loss trigger loneliness?

Loss is recognised as a
significant life event which can
trigger loneliness.

Both death-related and
non-death related losses can
cause a grief response of
similar intensity.

Death
of a loved
one Serious
illness of a loved
one Breakdown of
a marriage or family
unit Relationship break-up
Loss of a livelihood Death of a
beloved pet Loss of identity Loss
of friendship Death of a friend Loss
of physical abilities A miscarriage
Loss of a home or community Personal
illness Retirement Emigration Loss of
cognitive abilities Loss of abilities Life
transitions Loss of predictability in life
Unemployment Emigration Loss of abilities
Life transitions Loss of predictability in life
Estrangement Death of a hero Loss of
faith in community Loss of hope due
to climate change Loss of ability
to have a child Addiction
Leaving home

Psychological characteristics

Psychological factors influence loneliness through different coping styles, personalities, life experiences and social understandings.

Psychological

"I'm lonely because I'm old"
– Emotion focused
Those who manage problems by managing emotions are more likely to lower expectations of life

"I'm lonely because I just moved to a new city"
– Problem focused
Those who see the problem is external are more likely to attempt to fix it

Cultural characteristics

Social roles, status and identity influence how people interpret their life, family and friends.

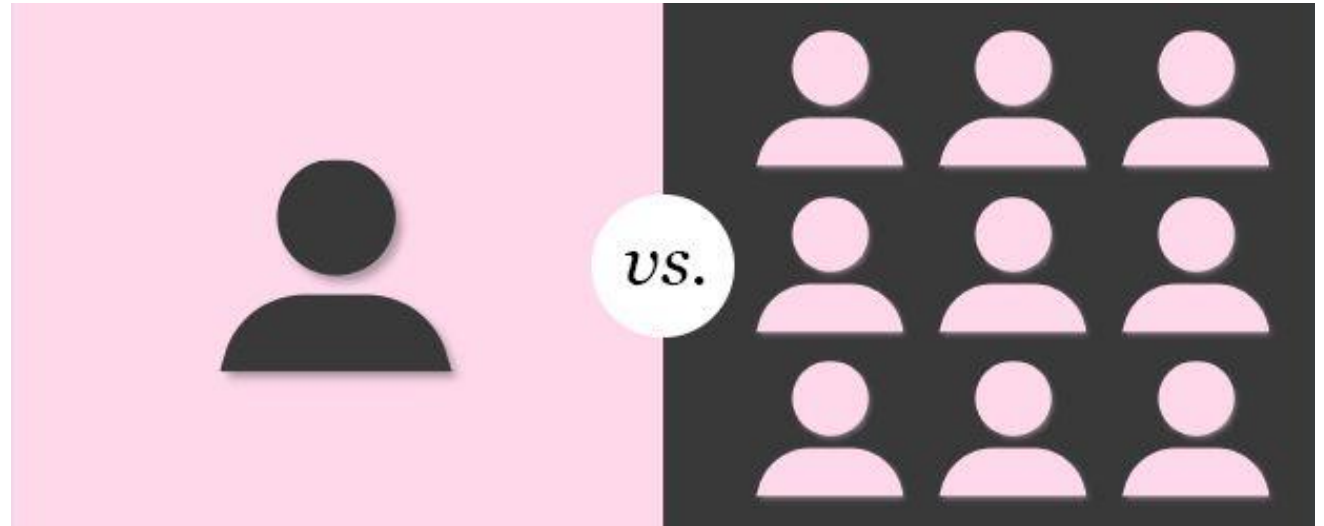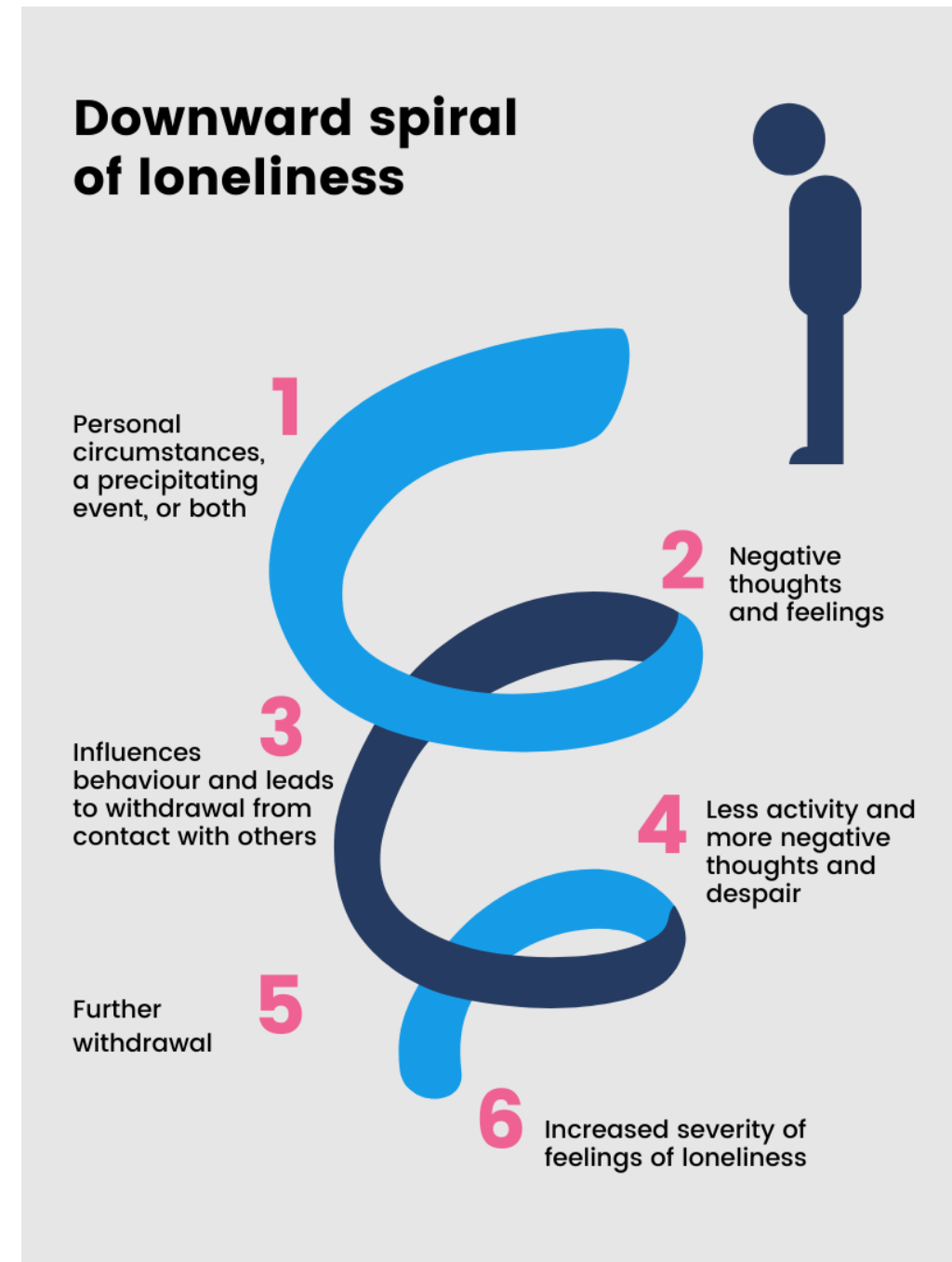**Cultural**

Individualist vs. **Collectivist**

Image source: Psychology Today

The downward spiral of loneliness

- loss of confidence

- behavioural changes

- withdrawal

- negative thoughts

- feelings of despair

Source: The Psychology of Loneliness: Why it matters and what we can do, 2020

Downward spiral of loneliness

1 Personal circumstances, a precipitating event, or both

2 Negative thoughts and feelings

3 Influences behaviour and leads to withdrawal from contact with others

4 Less activity and more negative thoughts and despair

5 Further withdrawal

6 Increased severity of feelings of loneliness

Social loneliness
can lead to anxiety

Lack of a significant
relationship can lead to
depression

Impacts on mental & physical wellbeing

Increased risk of:
- mental health problems
- insomnia
- low self-esteem & confidence
- increased stress (linked to cortisol)
- higher risk of dementia & Alzheimer's
- poorer cardiovascular health
- reduced immunity
- obesity
- stroke
- cognitive decline
- premature death

Upward spiral out of loneliness using psychological techniques

6 Increased activity and engagement reducing loneliness severity

5 More positive thoughts and feelings leading to change in behaviour related to engagement with people or place

4 Experiencing a shift in thoughts and feelings and a belief of positive change

3 Knowing that these patterns can be changed. Challenging negative automatic thoughts and feelings by practicing psychological techniques that help to re-frame them.

2 Recognising that unchallenged negative thoughts and feelings have led to patterns of behaviour that have become hard to shift

1 Awareness that thoughts and feelings related to loneliness influence behaviour

The upward spiral out of loneliness

- Self-awareness

- Challenging negative thoughts

- Reframing thoughts

- Positive shift in thoughts

- Change in behaviour

- Increased engagement with others

Part 2: Loneliness in the workplace

Loneliness in the workplace

- Emotional withdrawal

- Decrease in communication and interaction

- Lack of participation in activities that involve groupwork

Causes of workplace loneliness

- Geographical circumstances

- New employee joining the team

- Workplace bullying

- Personality clashes

Shift work and working remotely

- Exhaustion

- Difference in roles; appropriateness

- Relationship problems

Signs of an isolated or lonely worker

- Missing deadlines
- Showing up to work late
- Making uncharacteristic mistakes
- Avoiding meetings
- Keeping camera off during video meetings
- Deflecting any non-work-related questions
- Limiting interaction with co-workers
- Low energy levels
- Excessive working

5 ways to tackle loneliness in the workplace

1. Create opportunities for people to build interpersonal relationships

- Engaging work culture
- Intentional time for 'water cooler chats'
- Initiate conversations that are non-work-related

5 ways to tackle loneliness in the workplace

2. Don't leave the room until everyone's engaged in conversation

- Talkers and listeners are both valuable
- Make a point to engage all people

5 ways to tackle loneliness in the workplace

3. Encourage employee engagement

- For remote workers, use video tools as often as possible
- Regularly schedule team "all hands" or "standup/walking" meetings

5 ways to tackle loneliness in the workplace

4. Create an environment conducive to collaboration

- Inter-departmental collaboration

- Widen circles of communication

5 ways to tackle loneliness in the workplace

5. Seek consultation if you are concerned

- Sometimes workplace loneliness is a symptom of something greater
- Speak up; consult your people and culture lead/HR team

Supporting a colleague who is lonely

Normalise and validate loneliness

Challenge stigma and stereotypes

Be present and listen without judgement

Regularly check-in and talk about things other than work

Share support resources and information

Connecting with the community

A simple 3-step plan

1. Recognise that loneliness is common and accept it as a normal part of being human.

2. Make a plan to stay connected. Focus on what IS possible rather than what's NOT possible.

3. Take action!

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

More confidence and hope

Problems feel more manageable

Less burdened

Improve physical and emotional wellbeing

Feel less alone in our suffering

Helps to build trust in others
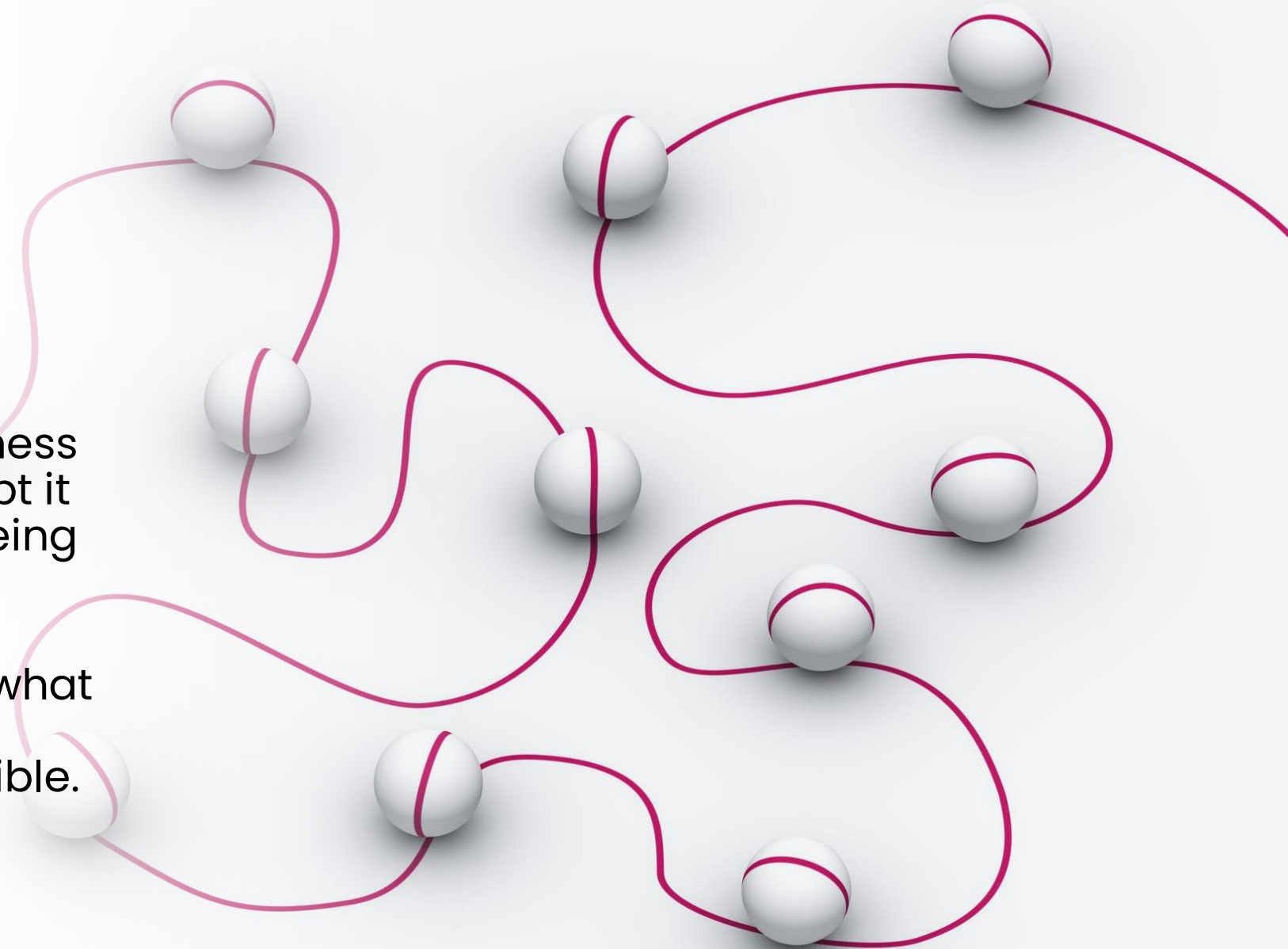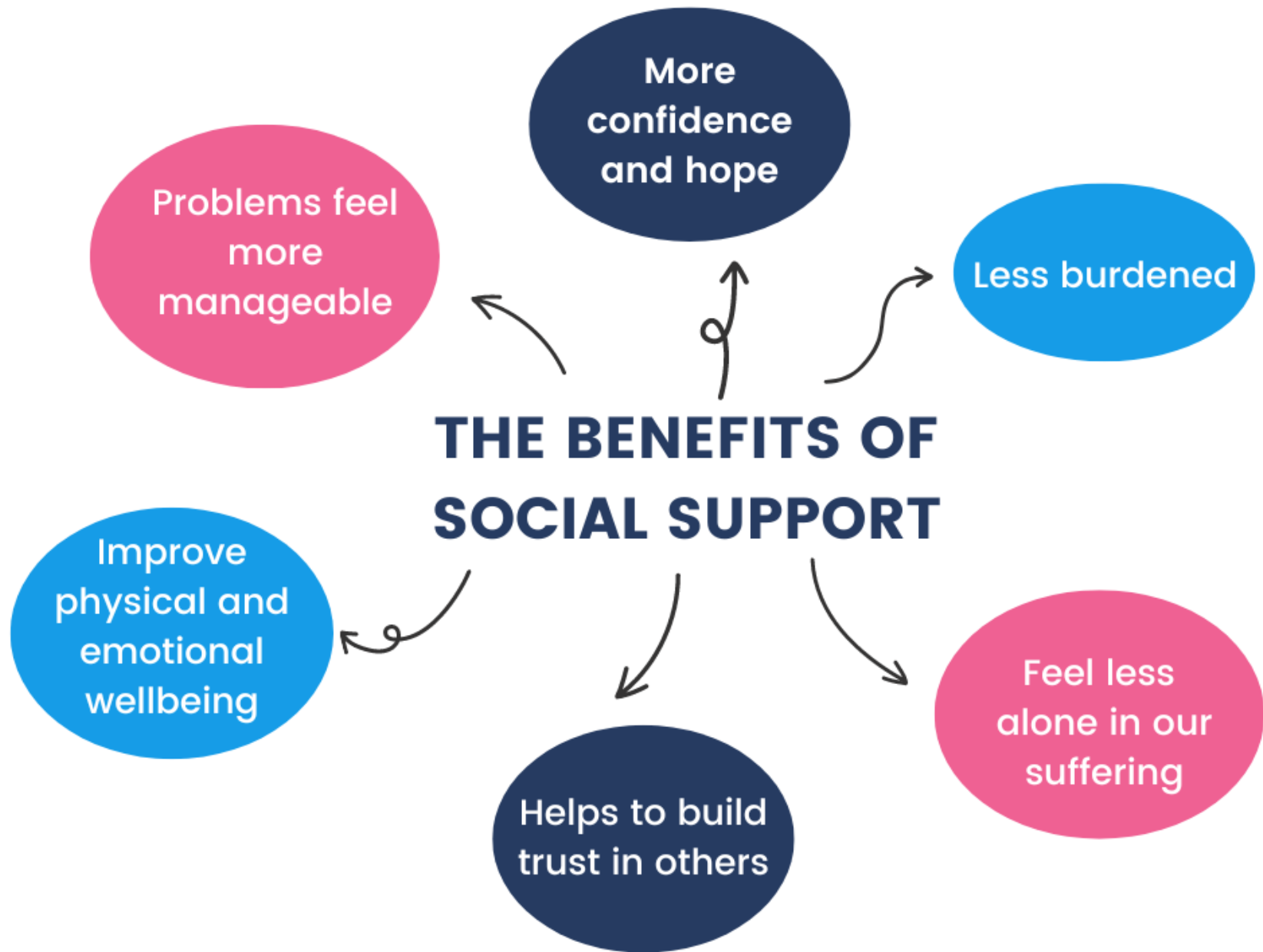
Griefline's programs and services
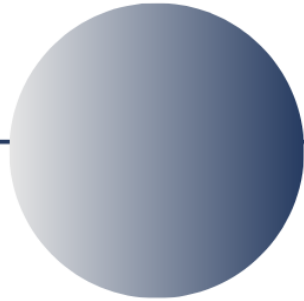
Prevention & education

Online self-help resources

Self-paced online learning & workplace training

YouTube series & podcast

Translated fact sheets
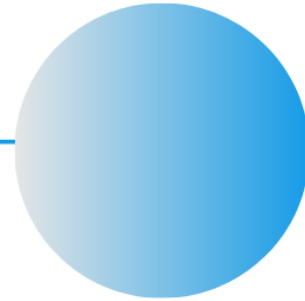
Early intervention

National telephone support

- toll-free helpline
- booked grief support calls

Online moderated forums

Online bereavement support groups
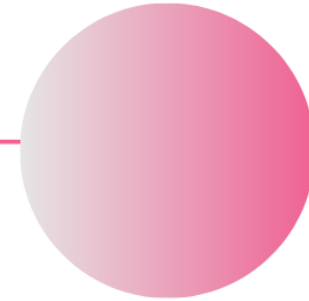
Specialised care

Grief & bereavement sessional counselling & support programs

- Policeline (Vic only)
- Integrating grief (NSW only)

Toolkit: Griefline resources

YouTube series: [Courageous conversations](#)

Grief and loss resource hub: [Loneliness and isolation](#)

Fact sheets: [Loneliness and grief](#)

Online learning: [Addressing loneliness course](#)

Community and connection comes in all forms.

Inviting courageous conversations

Call our national helpline
1300 845 745
9am–midnight AEST

Visit our website for support resources and online forums

griefline.org.au

Are you ready for a courageous conversation? Join Matthew Jackson as he explores loneliness during lockdowns and how to show up for your mates in hard times.

Toolkit: Third-party resources

R U OK? Workplace Resources https://www.ruok.org.au/work

Friends For Good https://friendsforgood.org.au/

Ending Loneliness Together https://endingloneliness.com.au/resources/

Meetup https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/

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References

Endinglonelinesstogether.com.au

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