

Supporting older carers

Tool 3: Supporting older carers to be socially connected

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This tool supports practitioners and teams to reflect on how well they are supporting carers to maintain existing relationships, make meaningful connections, and access support and technology as a gateway to enabling social connections.

Older carers are at risk of becoming socially isolated which in turn can lead to physical and mental ill-health, particularly depression (Larkin, Henwood & Milne, 2019; Maun, Glaser, & Corna, 2020). Relationships with social care and health professionals are crucial to older carers feeling able to talk openly about their feelings and maintain their social networks. Examples of older carers feelings about their lack of social connection from the research project:

'It's as if I'm invisible.'

'My last few years at work were very unhappy ones. I did not get the support I needed.'



'It's lonely out there. You need to feel someone cares about you.'

'I just asked for a carer's assessment. I've called twice now and no one has called me back. You do feel very lonely at times.'



Questions for reflection

Use these questions to help you reflect on what you are doing and what you can do to help older carers stay socially connected.

How are you supporting older carers to:

- > Maintain existing relationships?

- > Join local groups (such as carers groups)?

- > Pursue their interests?

- > Access transport and technology as a gateway to social connections?

- > How can you improve neighbourhood and community development that enables carers to stay socially connected?

The [Campaign to End Loneliness website](https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/) also has some resources to support effective practice with loneliness in later life.

References

Larkin, M., Henwood, M., & Milne, A. (2019). Carer-related research and knowledge: findings from a scoping review. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 27(1), 55–67.

Maun, E., Glaser, K., & Corna, L. (2020). Co-resident care-giving and problematic sleep among older people: Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study. *Ageing and Society*, 40(6), 1195–1222.



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