

A young woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing glasses, a white t-shirt, and blue jeans, stands in a hallway. She has a light-colored backpack on her right shoulder and is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a blurred hallway with a white wall and a door.

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UNiDAYS

Finding Your People:

Coping with Loneliness & Building
Connections at University

Find Your People, by First Finding Yourself.

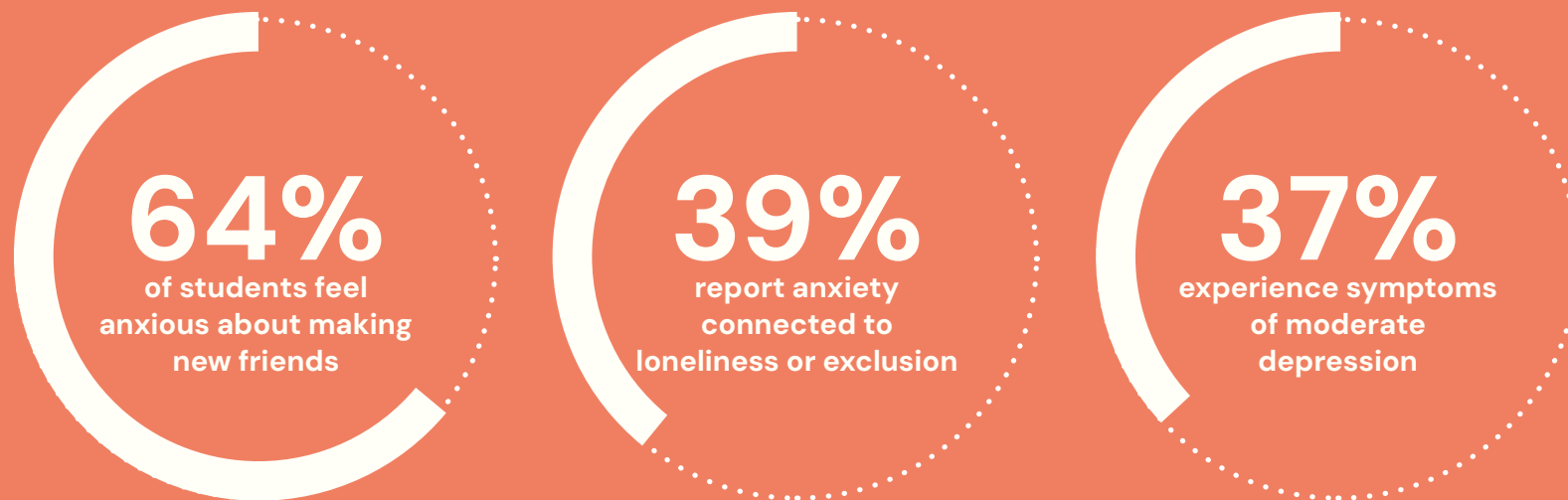
University is often described as “the best years of your life” – but for many students, it can also feel lonely, overwhelming, or isolating. If you’ve ever felt like you don’t quite fit in, you’re not alone – and it doesn’t mean anything is wrong with you.

You’re not weird, broken, or “behind.” You’re human. And connection is something we all need – not just socially, but emotionally. It’s okay if it takes time to find your rhythm, your people, and your place. Just because it’s hard now doesn’t mean it always will be.

This guide from **Carecoins** explores why so many students feel disconnected and offers compassionate, practical steps for building meaningful connections – at your own pace, and in your own way.

What the Stats Show

It might feel like you're the only one struggling to connect – but you're definitely not. In fact, the numbers show how common this feeling really is.



Many students feel FOMO (fear of missing out) after seeing others socialising online

It can help just to know you're not alone in this. Behind the smiles and highlight reels, lots of students are still trying to figure things out – just like you.

Why Loneliness Happens at Uni

One of the hardest parts of feeling lonely is that it often comes with self-blame. You might ask yourself, “Why can’t I just make friends like everyone else?” or “What’s wrong with me?” But loneliness at university is rarely about personal failure – it’s often about circumstances, timing, and the huge transitions you’re going through.

You’re managing change on nearly every level: environment, routines, social circles, academic expectations – maybe even culture or language. It’s a lot for one person to process. And when you’re under that much pressure, connection can feel harder to build or maintain.

Here are a few common reasons students feel disconnected:

You’re adapting to massive change –

moving away from home, adjusting to new routines, navigating independence

You’re feeling pressure to make friends immediately –

which can feel intense, especially during freshers’ week

You’re comparing your experience to others online –

where everyone seems to have found “their people” already

You’re part of a group that feels less visible –

such as LGBTQ+, neurodiverse, international or mature students

You’re around people, but not connecting –

loneliness can happen even in crowds when you don’t feel seen

These challenges don’t make you the problem. They make you normal – **and they’re more common than most people let on.**

Try Low-Key Social Moments

The idea of “putting yourself out there” can feel exhausting or even scary when you’re already low. The good news? You don’t have to do everything at once. Connection doesn’t require big, bold moves – just tiny steps in the right direction, taken at your own pace.

You might be surprised how often people are also waiting for someone to say hello first – or how a small moment of kindness or shared humour can be the beginning of something meaningful.

If big group events feel overwhelming (or just not your thing), that’s completely valid. There are lots of ways to build connection that don’t involve pushing yourself out of your comfort zone all at once.



You could try:

1. Walking to lectures with someone from your course –

Even five minutes of small talk can help build comfort.

2. Invite a flatmate to cook or eat together –

Sharing space makes connection feel easier and more natural.

3. Attend chill events like craft nights, board games, or film screenings –

No pressure to socialise intensely.

4. Look for peer support or interest-based groups –

Where people are there to connect at their own pace.

These little moments help you feel part of something and often build more trust and connection over time than you might expect. You’re allowed to connect gently, even one friendly face can change the tone of your day.

Use Shared Interests as a Starting Point

Friendship tends to happen more easily when you're doing something you enjoy, rather than trying to force conversation from scratch. Shared spaces with shared interests create natural conversation – and can help remove the awkward pressure to “click” instantly.

Think about:

Joining a society or student group that aligns with your hobbies or values

Volunteering with a cause or community you care about

Trying a beginner-friendly club, like board games or film nights

Attending uni-run events designed to connect students gently (look for wellbeing socials!)

It's not about being loud or outgoing – it's about showing up somewhere you can be yourself.

Reconnect With Yourself First

Loneliness often creates this ache that we try to fill quickly – with people, distractions, noise. But sometimes the first and most powerful step is reconnecting inward. Because when you feel safe and grounded with yourself, it becomes easier to reach outward in a way that feels genuine.

You don't have to "fix" yourself before making friends – but tuning into your own thoughts, needs, and values can help you feel more steady in the meantime. It reminds you that you are good company, too.



You might try:

1. Journalling your thoughts and feelings

Writing it down helps you understand yourself and process emotions

2. Practising self-compassion

Try speaking to yourself the way you'd speak to a friend going through the same thing

3. Doing solo things you enjoy

Reading in a park, going to a gallery, watching comfort TV – your time is still valuable

4. Affirming your worth regularly

Even a simple "I am enough, even when I feel alone" can shift your internal voice

You're not waiting for someone to make you whole – you're already whole. You're just looking to share that wholeness with the right people, in time.

Grounding Practices for Emotional Loneliness

Loneliness doesn't just sit in the mind – it sits in the body. It can feel like a physical ache, a tight chest, a heaviness in your limbs. That's because when we feel disconnected, our nervous system often goes into stress mode.

Grounding is about calming that inner alarm. It brings you back to your body, back to the moment, and reminds you that you're okay – even if things feel hard right now.

Here are a few tools that can help when the emotions feel too much:

Reconnect with a supportive voice

Try to imagine what someone kind would say to you. Better yet, write it down.

"I'm doing my best. It's okay to feel like this. It won't always feel this way."

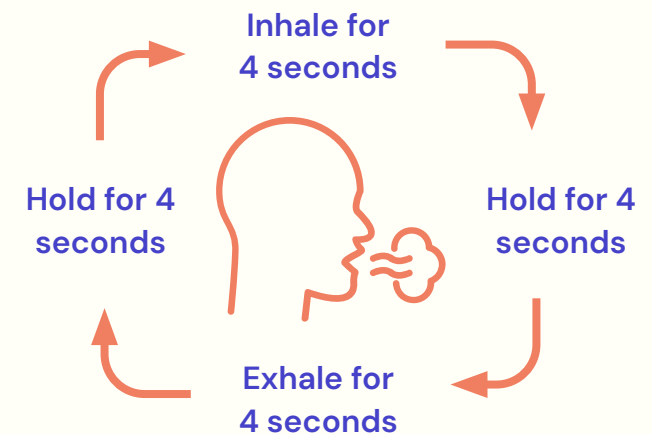
Use the "bridge out" method

If a big event feels overwhelming, ask yourself: what's one low-stakes step I could take instead?

Maybe it's messaging someone, saying hello in passing, or sitting in a shared space. Small is fine.

These practices won't erase loneliness – but they give your mind and body space to regulate, so you're better able to connect again when you're ready.

Try box breathing to calm your system



This resets your nervous system and can help you feel less anxious or frozen.



Building a Sustainable Social Life

There's a lot of pressure at university to have a huge social life – to always be “doing things,” posting photos, keeping up. But the truth is, a sustainable social life looks different for everyone. For some, that's a packed calendar. For others, it's a few deep friendships and lots of quiet evenings. Both are valid.

You don't need to be popular to be connected. You need relationships that feel safe, mutual, and real. And those take time.

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Here's what helps:

1. Say no without guilt –

Social energy is a limited resource. Spend it where it matters.

2. Let friendships grow slowly –

Trust builds over time, not overnight. Give it space.

3. Find people who “get” you –

You deserve to be around people who make you feel seen and safe.

4. Be honest with yourself –

Not every event is for you, and that's okay. Choose connection over performance.

5. Stay open –

It might not happen how or when you expected, but connection will come.

You don't need to have it all figured out right now. You're not behind – you're just building something real.



Where to Get Support

Whatever you're facing – whether it's something overwhelming or just a quiet feeling that something's off – you don't have to go through it alone. Support is there for you, no matter how big or small things might feel. Reaching out doesn't mean you're failing – in fact, it takes a lot of strength to say, "I'm not okay right now." Your mental health matters just as much as your grades, your goals, or anything else you're juggling and you're allowed to put yourself first. There are people ready to listen and help when you're ready:



On Campus:

- 🕒 **University counselling services** (waiting lists can be long — reach out early)
- 🕒 **Student union or welfare officers**
- 🕒 **Personal tutors and academic advisors**
- 🕒 **Peer support groups**

External Resources:

- 🕒 **Student Minds:** studentminds.org.uk
- 🕒 **Mind:** mind.org.uk
- 🕒 **Papyrus:** For suicide prevention in young people papyrus-uk.org
- 🕒 **Samaritans:** Call 116 123 anytime, for free

Self-Help Tools:

- 🕒 **Apps:** Headspace, Calm, MoodTools, Student Health
- 🕒 **Togetherall:** A peer support community available to many students
- 🕒 **Podcasts:** “The Mindful Student”
“Happy Place”
- 🕒 **Speak to friends and family**



If you need the extra support...

We know that taking the first step can feel overwhelming — but you don't have to do it alone. Through our partnership with **UNiDAYS**, students can now access personalised, high-quality mental health support at an exclusive discount:

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40% off your first 3 Carecoins –
Covering your initial consultation and first hour of therapy

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Because support should be sustainable

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t: **0300 002 0061**

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