

# The Connected Path:

Tools to reconnect  
and thrive



Workbook by  
**Serve The City**  
Maastricht





# Introduction

Setting the Foundation

# Welcome!

We are all, to some extent, familiar with loneliness. Loneliness is a feeling designed to make us seek human warmth and connection, which are of utter importance for social beings like us. But this universal emotion can become problematic when we experience it in excess. If you find yourself feeling lonely often, this book will help you to understand loneliness and give you the tools to do something about it.

You may have been feeling lonely for a long time or maybe you only started to experience loneliness recently. You may feel trapped and not know what to do. What if things didn't have to be this way? How can you grow the number of meaningful connections with other people in your life and perhaps decrease your shyness in connecting with others? This workbook will help you answer these questions and allow you to improve your relationship with yourself and with others step by step.

## How to use this workbook?

How can you utilize these insights? There are going to be a series of exercises you will do throughout your journey. These exercises help you to develop your self-awareness, so that you can plan and develop strategies to deal with aspects that may be contributing to your loneliness. They are there for you to evaluate how much progress you feel you are making and identify what is helping you make it. Remember, this journey has ups and downs and that is perfectly fine. You may not feel ready to move on to a new exercise or feel the need to go back to an earlier one to revise the concept. This book is merely a guideline with some strategies. So, feel free to make it your own and work with it in a way that is beneficial to you. There are different parts to each chapter:

1. Introductory information: short paragraphs on the topic of the chapter to help you understand the background.
2. In-chapter exercises: designed to help you develop healthy and productive strategies to engage with and resolve your feelings of loneliness.
3. End-of-chapter exercises: encourage reflection on your overall progress. They help you assess where you are in your journey and identify which parts of the chapter resonated most with you.



# Chapter 1

What is loneliness?

# 01 Background

## What is loneliness?

Why do we feel lonely? As humans, we are all programmed to search for human connection. This need to be with other people makes sense if we think about evolution and how it shaped us. Over millions of years of evolution, being part of a group was necessary for survival and passing one's genes to future generations. That means that the genes which encouraged our ancestors to seek human connection are the ones that have been passed on to us. It lies within our DNA to search for social contact. Much like we need water and food to survive, we also need social connection. It is no wonder then that the lack of connection – the experience of loneliness – results in negative emotions. Just as it is unpleasant to be hungry or thirsty, it is unpleasant to be lonely.

*"I am fifty-six and only recently divorced my husband. When I was still with my husband and told someone that I felt lonely they responded with "but you're married." I have learned the difference between being alone and feeling lonely. I still often feel lonely. It can be overwhelming at times, a physical sensation. But at least now, when I say such a thing, people are more empathetic."*

## Who experiences loneliness?

Anyone can feel lonely. No matter how rich, popular or social they are, anyone can experience loneliness. We tend to wrongly assume that being outgoing and having a lot of friends is the universal key to preventing loneliness. In reality, that is far from the truth. Everyone has their own specific needs for human connection which differ from the needs of other people. One person may be happiest having one or two close friends, while another needs to surround themselves with more people to feel fully socially connected. The reason behind loneliness usually comes from a mismatch between our individual social need and our environment. There are many situations which can contribute to loneliness.

## It is not your fault

It is crucial to understand that nobody should be blamed for loneliness. If you often feel lonely you may find yourself thinking that there must be something you are doing wrong or that there is simply something wrong with you. The truth is that loneliness can creep into everyone's life without any fault of oneself. Loneliness also often forms a vicious cycle, and once it enters your life it can be very difficult to notice and break its patterns on your own. As you will come to learn throughout the book, those processes which reinforce loneliness can be countered once we become aware of them.



## Exercise 1

We are now going to explore what type of loneliness you identify with the most. For this, you will go through some statements and tick the box you relate the most to.

	<b>Absolutely</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>More or less</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Certainly not</b>
I am always surrounded by people					
There are enough people I can fall back on in case of trouble					
I have many people I can completely trust					
There are plenty of people I feel closely connected to					
I have plenty of options to fill my weekend by seeing others					
I wonder if anyone would notice if I fall sick at home					



# 02 Types of loneliness

## Two types of loneliness

When doing the exercise above, you may have noticed that one can distinguish between two types of loneliness.

**Statements 2, 3 and 4** refer to **emotional loneliness** (or connectedness, depending on your answer), where you miss intimate relationships, such as a strong emotional bond with a partner or a good friend.

**Statements 1, 5 and 6** point more to **social loneliness** or isolation, where you face shortcomings in your actual contact with and exposure to a broader group of people, such as friends, acquaintances, colleagues or neighbours.





**Social loneliness:** This type of loneliness comes from missing social connections. Because we do not spend much time with other people, we do not get the opportunity to connect with them.

*"My contact with my colleagues at the office was always important to me, and as more and more friends had families or moved away the office became an ever more important social focus point for me. Then came Covid and with it home office. Nowadays many of us still work from home, and while my colleagues enjoy it I feel more isolated than ever before. Because everyone is busy, building up a new network of people after work is really difficult I find. At the moment, I'm alone during the day and I have nobody to spend my time with after work, either."*

**Emotional loneliness:** This type of loneliness comes from missing emotional connection, even if we have enough people in our lives.

*"I'm a very sociable person and through my profession I meet a lot of people every day. I'm cheerful and outgoing and I talk a lot. Nobody knows that there's no one in my life that I have a close relationship with. No one. I have a lot of hobbies and meet people there, too. But no one knows me. I mean, really knows me. I have now realised that the way I am in social relationships perpetuates my loneliness. By being talkative, I cover up my own insecurities so that no one can see me for who I really am. I feel lonely in the midst of people and the fact that I only have superficial relationships with others creates a deep sense of sadness within me."*

# 03 The Role of Change

## Recent changes?

Loneliness often (but not always) arises from major changes in your life. This can be the result of the death of a person close to you, a move, a change of job, living on your own, your children moving out, a divorce, or even a marriage. What these situations have in common is that they can throw you off balance because old patterns that gave you security and often social structure disappear, and no new structures have yet emerged. This process does not always happen automatically and it can take time to find a new balance.

## Changes are a part of it...

Changes are a part of life, and everyone experiences them. After a major change, it is often necessary to reshape your life, do new things, or let new people into your life. This also means saying goodbye to the old, which is not always easy. For example, changing your environment presents many challenges. Scientific research has shown that it takes at least three months to integrate yourself into a new home or job, and most people struggle with this for up to a year before feeling fully integrated. You have to make new connections, adjust to new norms and often learn a great deal in a short time, all while battling homesickness, loneliness, stress and maybe even self-doubt or imposter syndrome. The effect of a change on someone's life can vary and is different for each person. It is important to recognize that a change has thrown you off balance and that you can restore that balance. You hold the key to getting your life back on track.

## Resistance

The process of change often involves resistance. We are attached to the old because it gives us security, which can lead to resistance to new things in our lives. Examples of this are avoiding new friendships because they are not the same as your old friends, or not going on vacation because you used to do this with your partner and now you don't want to go alone. This resistance can be both conscious and unconscious, and you will have to overcome it first to make room for the new. Now it is time for some self-reflection.

### Exercise 2

What changes in your life may have contributed to your feelings of loneliness?

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What do you think is stopping you from overcoming the feeling of loneliness and making meaningful social connections?

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## **Loneliness is not your fault**

Messages around us, especially those coming from popular culture and social media, often make it seem like overcoming loneliness requires changing oneself, “fixing” one’s flaws in order to fit in better. Such a misleading belief can leave people unhappy, fulfilling social expectations instead of their own social needs. In reality, feeling connected to others entails exactly the opposite; instead of changing the way you are, we encourage you to get to know yourself better and understand what you really need. The foundation for getting out of a state of loneliness is, in fact, staying true to yourself.



# 04 Chapter completion exercises

How can you utilize these (new) insights? There are going to be a series of exercises you repeat throughout your journey. They are there for you to evaluate how much progress you feel you are making and identify what is helping you to make progress. If you feel that questions are not applicable yet or that you are not confident about reflecting on them, do not worry. Remember, this journey has ups and downs and that is perfectly fine, try to also identify when you feel down and think about the why when you can.

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## Pause to analyze

What is your main take-away from this chapter?

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## Your Ideal Goal

Write down an achievable goal that you hope to reach. This could be what you imagine a day in your life to be where you no longer feel lonely-or any other form of goal. (E.g. attending an event, joining a group/class/ club, deepening friendships, etc. )

- *Remember this goal for future reference.*

What do you want to implement from this chapter to reach this?



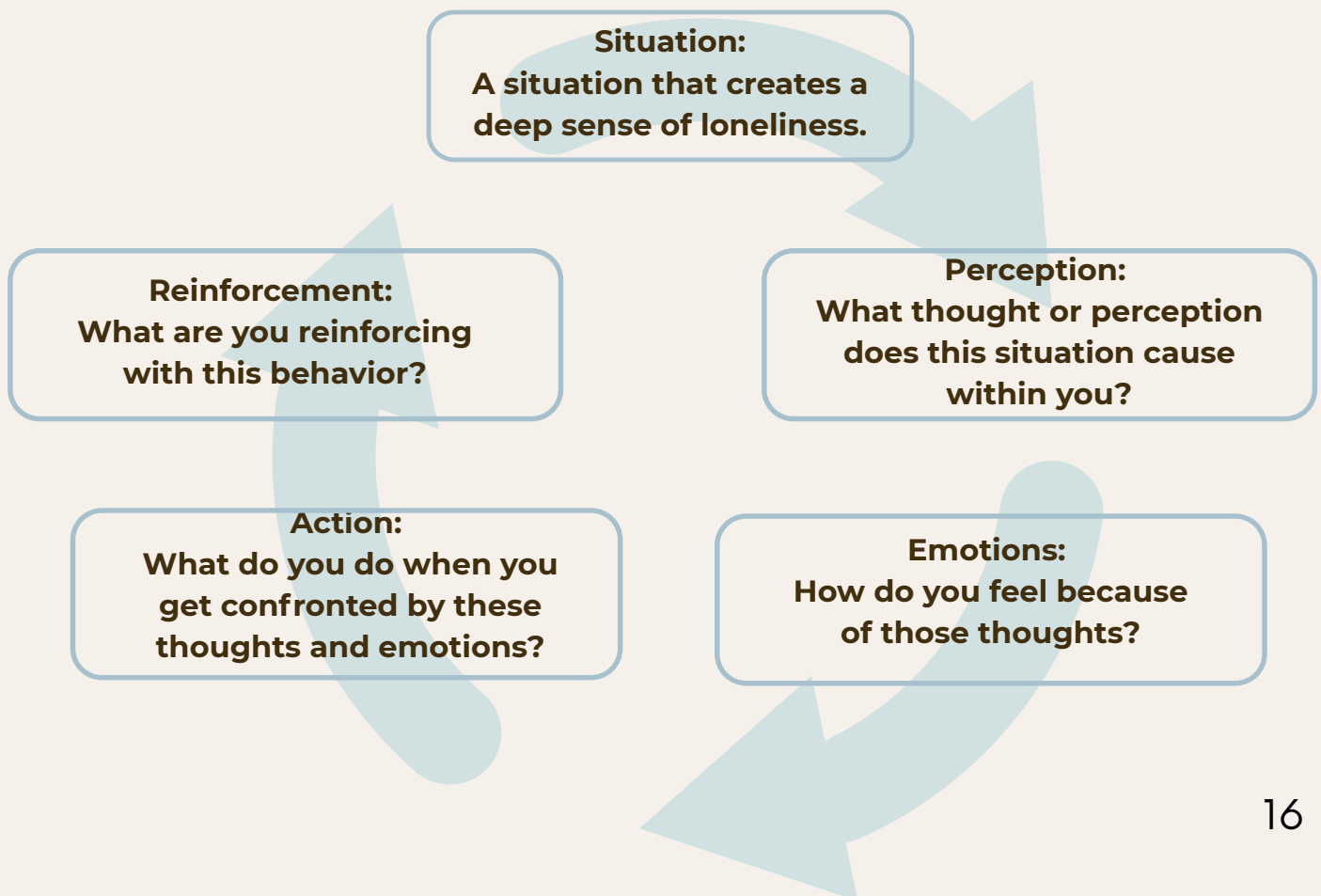


# Chapter 2

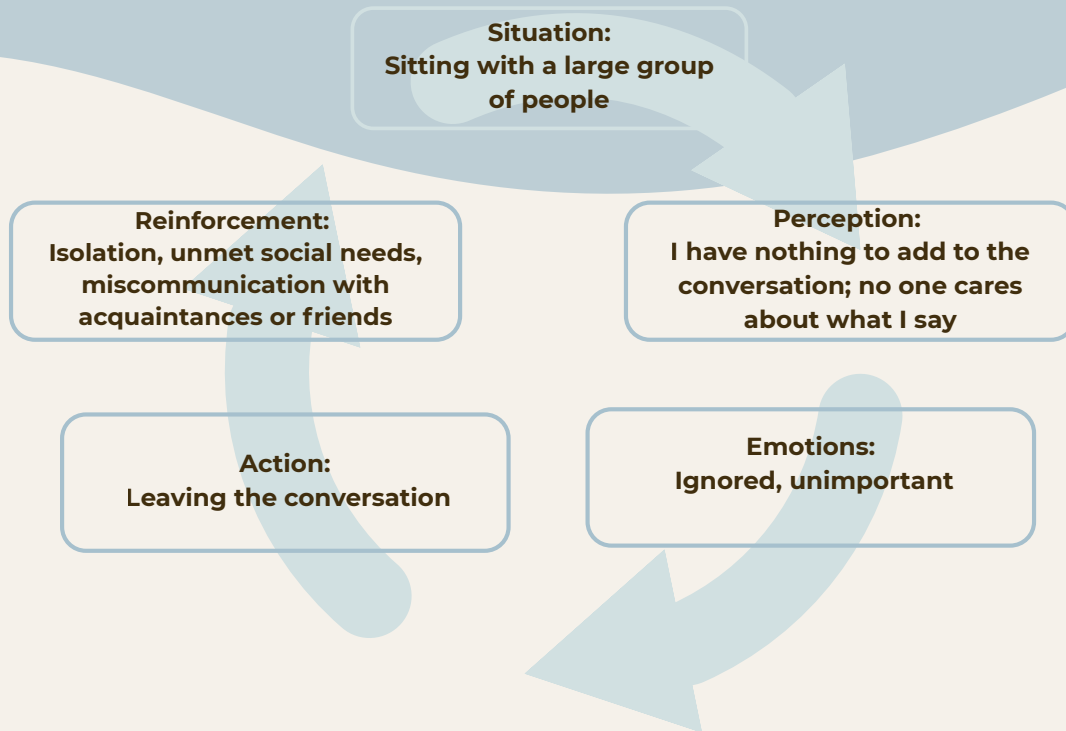
The relationship between thoughts and loneliness

# 01 The Maladaptive Cycle

It is important to realize that loneliness is more than just an unpleasant feeling. When we are lonely for a longer period it puts our body under a lot of stress. This stress signals that we are in a situation which is not in line with our needs as social beings. From an evolutionary perspective our body interprets this signal as a threat because survival without the group was practically impossible for much of humanity's history. This stress and the related stress hormones which are released interfere with many aspects of our lives, including the way we view ourselves and the world. For example, loneliness can make us defensive and more likely to search for signs that others dislike us. With such emotions clouding our mind, we may tend to think poorly of our actions and our social skills. These thoughts, in turn, can make us retreat further into our shell and increase our feeling of loneliness. This is what we call the *maladaptive thinking cycle*. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the way loneliness influences our thoughts and how these thoughts influence our loneliness.

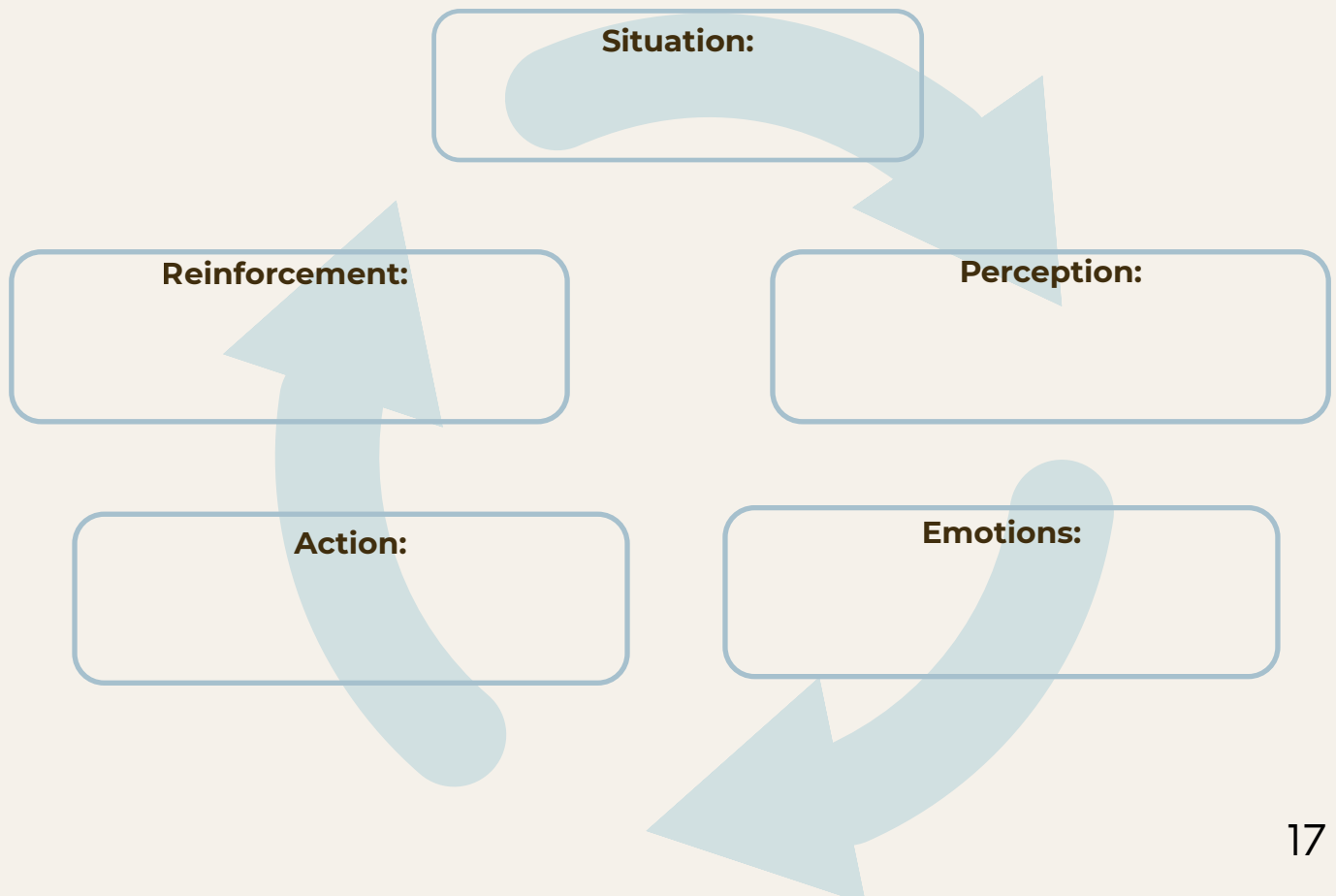


## Example:



## Exercise 1:

Try filling the cycle in yourself using a recent example where you felt lonely.



# 02 Addressing negative thoughts and perceptions

Once we make a habit of thinking negatively about ourselves, it is easy to believe that our perception is the truth. In reality, a lot of these harmful beliefs are caused or exaggerated by the stress of feeling lonely and when we inspect them more closely, we may realize that they are not actually true.

This exercise is about finding ways to ease feelings of loneliness when they arise in situations you often face. There are two main approaches which go hand in hand: changing how you think about the situation or changing how you respond to it.

For example, imagine spending a weekend with no plans and feeling disconnected. The first thought which comes to your mind might be something like, "Nobody cares about me." Instead of letting that thought take over, notice it: "I'm thinking again that no one cares about me." Then, question it: "Is this really true? Are there people who value me, even if I'm not seeing them right now?" You might remind yourself, "I've had meaningful conversations with friends before," or "Just because I'm alone this weekend, it doesn't mean I'm not important to others." Shifting the way you think can make the situation feel less heavy and more manageable.

When examining your negative perception, pay attention to these suspicious words: **always, never, everyone, no one**. They describe absolute situations, such as: "I *never* know what to say," which are realistically often impossible and incorrect. When you notice these words sneaking into your thoughts, take it as a sign to examine and question them.

For better understanding, take a look at the examples of common thinking errors:

- **Incorrect cause and effect relationship:** "She probably doesn't like me, otherwise she would have sat next to me." You're drawing a conclusion without it being based on facts.

- **Overgeneralize:** After stuttering twice during a conversation, you think: "This will never work, I will always stutter." Because you've experienced something twice, you think it will always be that way.
- **Black and white thinking:** "I completely messed up with my colleague. This can never be right again." After a mistake, you believe that all is lost and that it can no longer be put right.
- **Reading minds:** "Oh, he looks sullen; he's probably still angry because I didn't call." You think you know what someone else is thinking, often in a way that negatively affects you. In reality, you don't know what someone is thinking until you ask them.

Another way to tackle loneliness is by focusing on something different. If an empty weekend makes you feel isolated, plan something small but fulfilling, like starting a creative project, going for a walk in a favorite spot, or reaching out to someone for a chat. Taking even a small step can make a big difference in how the situation feels.



## Exercise 2

Think about a moment in your own life that triggers loneliness. Write down the usual thought you have in that moment and challenge it by asking if it's entirely true. Then, come up with an alternative thought that feels more realistic and less harsh. Finally, brainstorm one or two actions you could take to make that moment easier or more meaningful.

Take a look at the example, then fill out the table on the following page.

### Example:

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Maladaptive perception</b>	<b>Alternative thought</b>	<b>Action</b>
Sitting with a large group of friends	I do not understand what they are talking about, so I am useless because I cannot add anything relevant	I do not recognize what they are talking about, let me try to understand it better	Ask questions to join the conversation and gain more knowledge



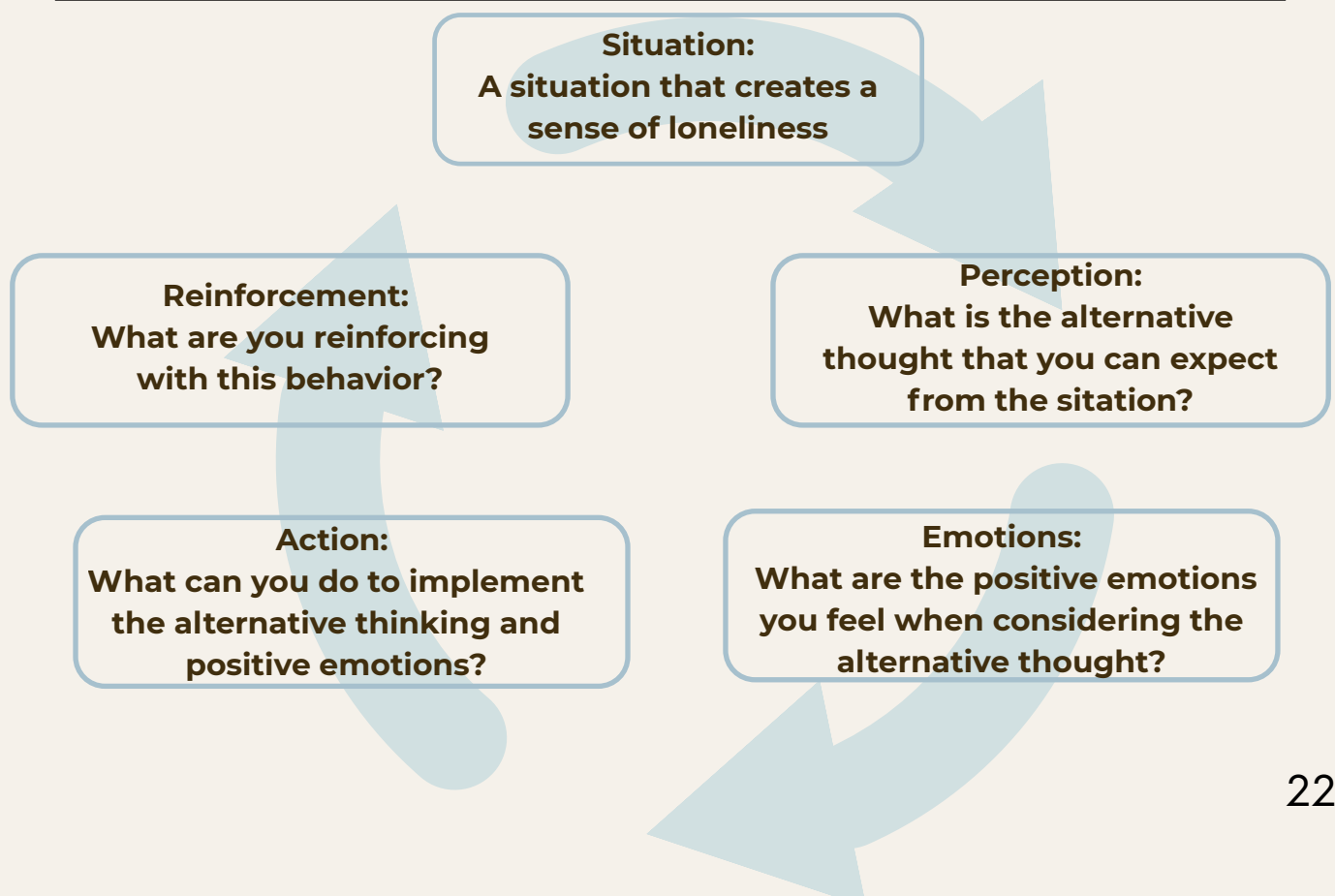
Situation	Maladaptive perception	Alternative thought	Action

# 03 Adaptive Thinking

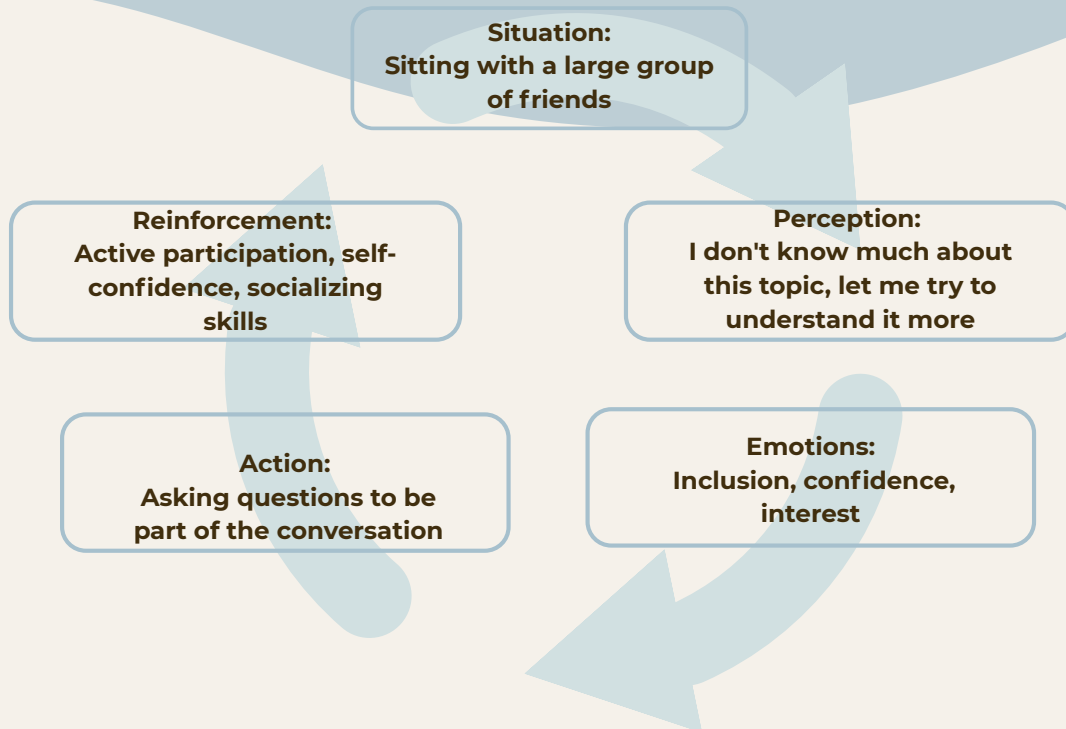
Can you think of more neutral ways to phrase the maladaptive perceptions you filled in above? By realizing the unfair negativity in our thinking and turning it into a more objective, productive thought we give ourselves a better opportunity to be open and communicative. Without an overly critical voice in our head, we can start to feel more secure when interacting with others. This type of positive reinforcement is called an *adaptive thinking cycle*.

Addressing our self-perception is the first step to overcoming loneliness. Studies have shown that the people who feel the most connected to others are not those with the most money, intelligence, or beauty. Instead, they are the ones who appear warm, open, and generous. People who aren't distracted by their own fears and worries can more easily be *there* for other people. In this section, you will learn how to systematically challenge negative self-perceptions, so that you can start to feel more at ease when being around others.

Take a look at how the cycle changes in adaptive thinking.

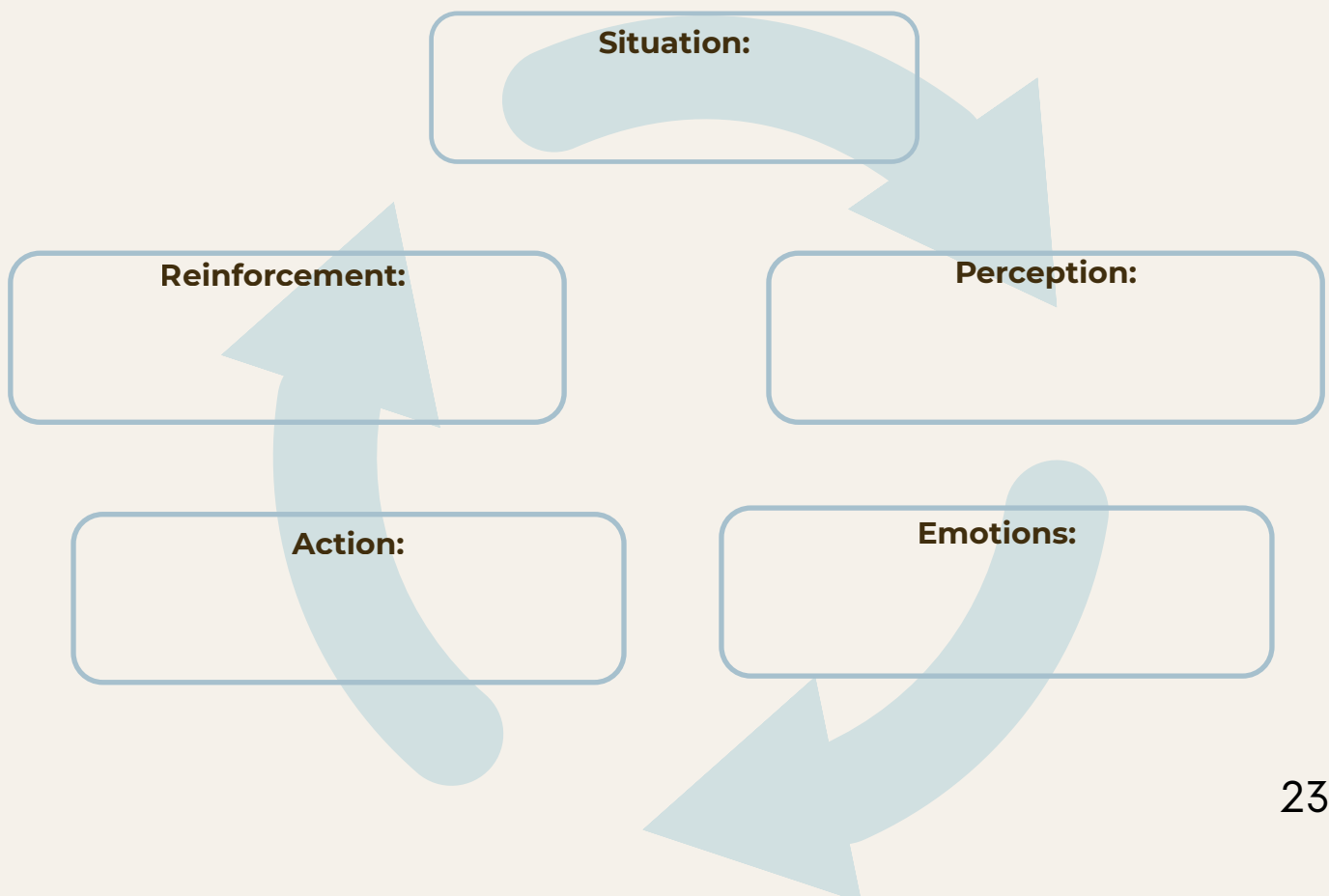


## Example:



## Exercise 3:

Try filling the cycle in yourself using the situation you filled in in exercise 1. How could you react to positively address this situation



These exercises show you how you can start reshaping your thoughts step by step. At first, you might find yourself returning to your usual thinking patterns (the *maladaptive thoughts*), but with time and practice, you will find that it gets easier to get rid of unpleasant self-perceptions and thoughts. Just like negative thoughts can sometimes become a habit, we can make a habit of positive (*adaptive*) thinking.

### Chapter summary

So far you have examined how your thoughts and beliefs about yourself contribute to and even worsen your loneliness. Knowing the power of your thoughts is a fundamental tool for overcoming loneliness and it will help you throughout the rest of this workbook as you explore your interactions with the people around you. The way you view yourself determines not only your own behavior but also how other people act toward you. Being more accepting of yourself makes it easier to approach other people without stress and it sends out a message that you are open to making a connection. We will return to that idea in the next chapters as we discover your social environment and your social needs.



# 04 Chapter completion exercises

How can you utilize these (new) insights? There are going to be a series of exercises you repeat throughout your journey. They are there for you to evaluate how much progress you feel you are making and identify what is helping you to make progress. If you feel that questions are not applicable yet or that you are not confident about reflecting on, do not worry. Remember, this journey has ups and downs and that is perfectly fine, try to also identify when you feel down and think about the why when you can.

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## Pause to analyze

What events have changed your status for better or worse during this chapter?

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What is your main take-away from this chapter?

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How can this help you reach your ideal goal formed in chapter 1?

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# Chapter 3

Where you are and where you want to be

# 01 Background

Now that you know what loneliness is and are aware how it affects you, you can start laying the foundations for a plan to achieve meaningful connections. The goal of this process is knowing what it is that you truly want. You may be surprised by this part of the journey. Perhaps you're thinking: "Why should I ask myself these questions if what I need is to have more people in my life or be closer to the people that I know?" When we think of our own social life, it is easy to get caught up in the expectations and goals that we believe we *should* follow. Society often tells us what we need in order to be happy, making it seem like the answer to our loneliness lies in having a big group of friends, a happy relationship, or popularity. Nevertheless, when you closely examine your needs and motivations, you may notice that the things you want are different from what your friends, family, or other people seem to desire. In this chapter, we will address your personal social priorities and explore their role in finding meaningful connections.

## Exercise 1

How would you describe your current environment? What activities do you generally enjoy? Do you enjoy socializing with a larger group of people around you, or do you benefit more from a few close friends? Write a short analysis of your social preferences:

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## Exercise 2

Looking forward: How would a day in your life look like if you were no longer lonely? What would change in your everyday life? What kinds of activities would you like to engage in? With whom? What would your social interactions look like? Write a summary of where you want to be:

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## Exercise 3

Take a critical look at your activities in the coming week and ask yourself if they contribute to achieving the wishes and needs that you have formulated above. Make a list of any changes that you want to make to better realize your goals and wishes. Write these changes down and include them in your planning for the coming weeks.

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# 02 Chapter completion exercises

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# Chapter 4

Examining your social network



# 01 Background

In the following chapter, you will take a closer look at another piece of this puzzle: your current social network. Everybody, regardless of their circumstances, is surrounded by their unique social network. All the people you interact with, such as your relatives, friends, neighbours, and coworkers are part of this social network. Feeling lonely usually means that something about this network doesn't satisfy your need for connection. You may feel that your network is incomplete, and you would like it to include more people. Maybe there are enough people in your network but the connections you have with them do not feel meaningful enough. Maybe you can't say for sure what is missing from your network, but you still find yourself feeling lonely. Discovering your own likes and dislikes and what your social environment looks like will help you understand how to fulfil your unique need for connection.

To begin with, follow exercise 1 to create a map of your current social network.

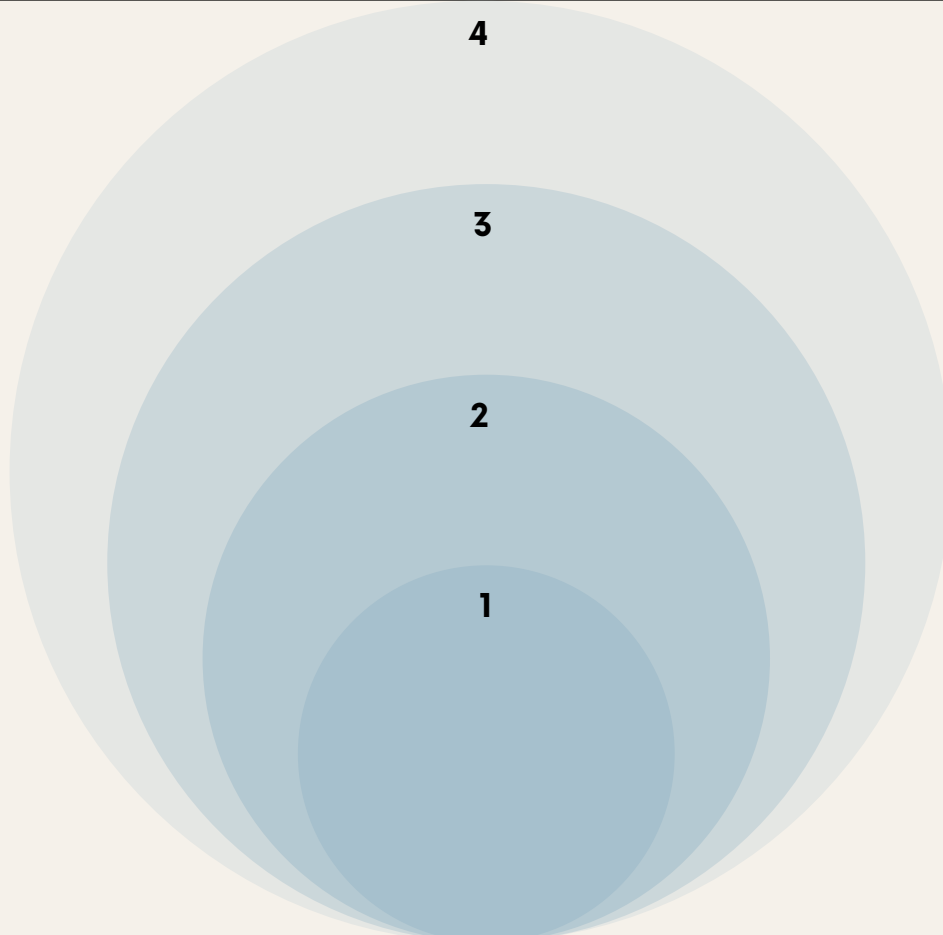


## Exercise 1

### Instructions:

In the following assignment you will make a sociogram. This is a method to gain insight into your personal social contacts. Place yourself in the centre of the page. This is the starting point of your sociogram.

- **Circle 1:** Place here the names of any people in your life who are indispensable to you and closest to you. These are your most intimate and essential contacts, such as your partner, best friends, or close family members.
- **Circle 2:** In this circle, put any friends you might have. These are people you have regular contact with and who are important to you but are not as close to you as the people in circle 1.
- **Circle 3:** Fill this circle with your acquaintances. These are people you know and meet occasionally, but with whom you do not have daily contact.
- **Circle 4:** Write down here people you may meet and interact with in your daily life on a superficial level, such as neighbours, (sports) club members, classmates, colleagues, doctors, employees of service providers, and people from your religious community.



## Exercise 2

Now let's analyze your network to make sure you know who you are surrounded by and how meaningful these connections are to you.

### Think about the following questions:

1. Do you feel that there are enough people, or would you like there to be more?
  - I want less people in my network
  - I have enough people in my network
  - I want more people in my network
2. Are your close relationships reciprocal or one-sided?
  - For reciprocal, draw a two-sided arrow ( $\leftrightarrow$ ) next to the name
  - For one sided, draw an arrow ( $\rightarrow$ )
3. Do you have relationships in your life that are negative or that you have conflicted feelings about? Draw a box around these names.
4. What about relationships that you would like more distance from?  
Underline these.
  - Think about which category you would move them to.
5. Which relationships do you feel positive about? Circle these names.
6. Are there people on your map that you would like to be closer to?  
Highlight these names.
  - Think about which category you want to move these people to.

## Exercise 2 continued

Could some of the relationships benefit from you acting differently within them? Draw a star next to these names. Pick the one you would most like to improve. Write down the name of the person and one behavior change you can implement in the relationship.

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Is anything missing from your network? If so, what?

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# 02 Chapter completion exercises

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How can this help you reach your ideal goal formed in chapter 1?

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# Chapter 5

EASE your way into social connections

# 01 Background

In the previous chapters you explored your environment, interests and the relationships you have with people around you. Now, let's take a moment to analyze how these aspects of your life connect to your **core values and ideals**.

People act based on their values and ideals, which shows the outer world what they perceive as important and can be a key factor in how they interact with others. Values are the principles that guide how you behave in everyday life. They are shaped by your culture, experiences and personal beliefs. Ideals, on the other hand, represents the "gold standard" that you strive towards in your life. This exercise is designed to help you explore your core values across four key areas of life: **growth & self-development, relationships & connections, health & well-being** and **purpose & contribution**. By identifying these values, you can evaluate how your current actions align with and support their fulfilment. This serves as the foundation for taking meaningful steps toward living in accordance with your values.

## Exercise 1

### Instructions:

- Choose up to 3 values in each area from the list of examples.
- Describe how each value currently presents in your life.
- Reflect on one way you could better live that value.

### Example:

Value	How is it reflected in your life?
Creativity	I work as an artist and try to capture concepts in new ways.



## 1. Growth and development

Think about your job, education, skill acquisition, creative pursuits.

- Values in this category: curiosity, lifelong learning, resilience, achievement, innovation, mastery, self-awareness, ambition, courage, discipline, open-mindedness, authenticity, creativity, confidence, freedom, wisdom, exploration, independence, boldness, emotional intelligence.

Value	How is it reflected in your life? How can you better apply it?

## 2. Relationships and connections

Think about your family, friends, acquaintances, romantic partners, community and social engagement.

- Values in this category: trust, compassion, authenticity, honesty, connection, commitment, love, empathy, vulnerability, belonging, compassion, respect, presence, communication, kindness, generosity, support, intimacy, tolerance, inclusivity, reliability, nurturing.

Value	How is it reflected in your life? How can you better apply it?

### 3. Health and well-being

Think about physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being, as well as your work-life balance.

- Values in this category: Balance, discipline, self-care, quality of life, vitality, peace, energy, mindfulness, simplicity, strength, cleanliness, safety, renewal, serenity, recovery, prevention.

Value	How is it reflected in your life? How can you better apply it?

### 4. Purpose and contribution

Think about the impact of your career, volunteering, causes you support, how you stand up for your beliefs and the legacy you want to create.

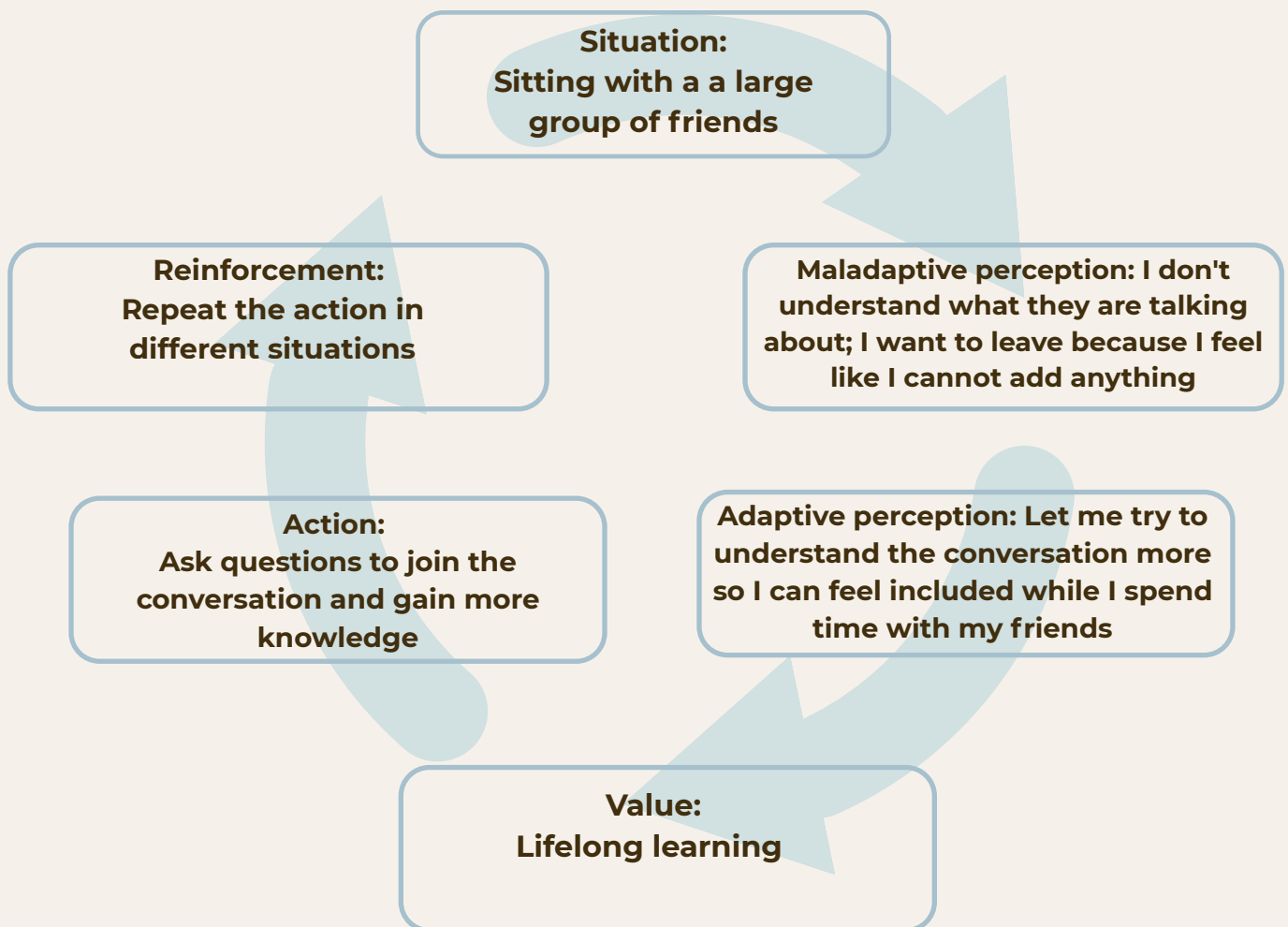
- Values in this category: service, integrity, impact, meaning, responsibility, justice, legacy, generosity, sustainability, contribution, faith, innovation, advocacy, activism, truth, empowerment .

Value	How is it reflected in your life? How can you better apply it?

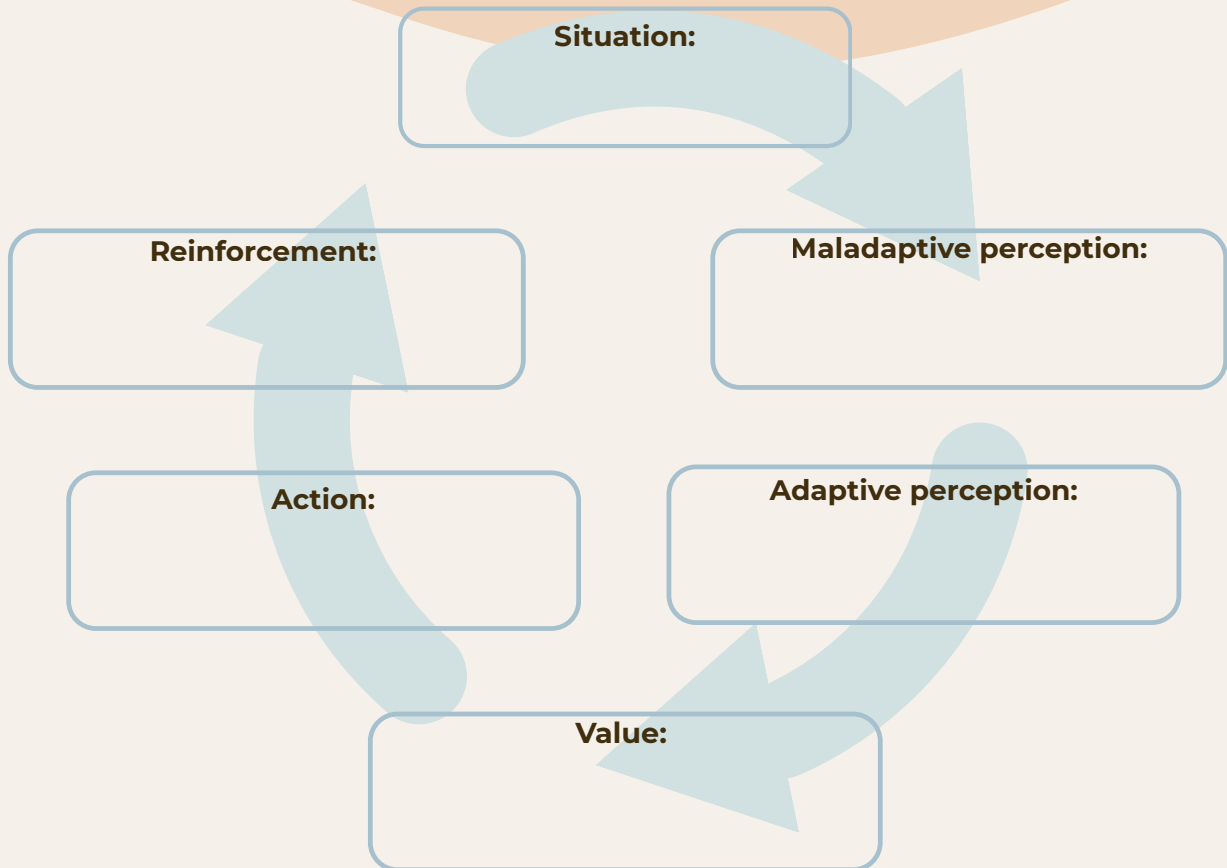
# 02 Applying adaptive thinking

## Exercise 2

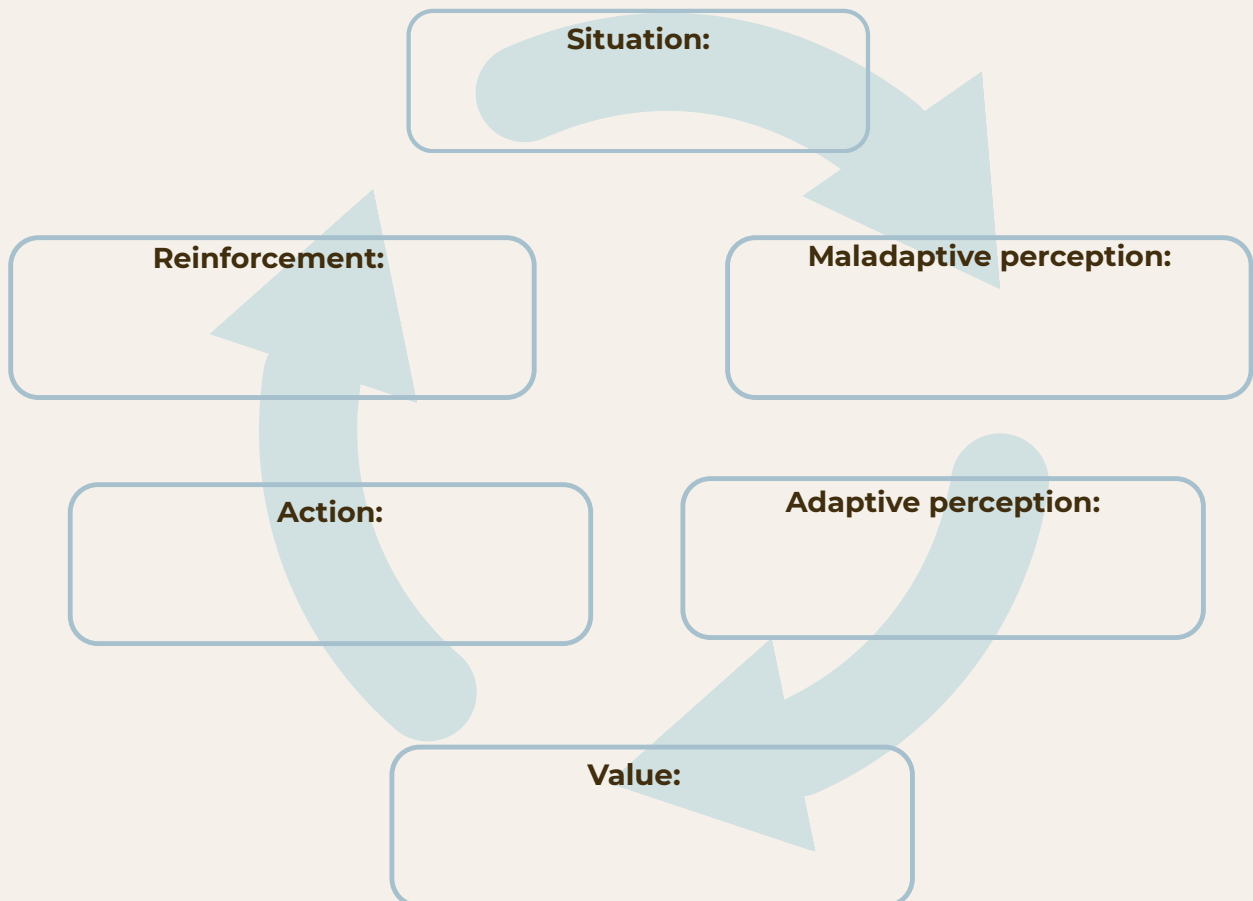
Now that you have identified your key values keep them in mind. Try and use them in the cycle we practiced. For each of the areas, identify a maladaptive thought pattern. *Which values do these patterns oppose?*  
See the example below.



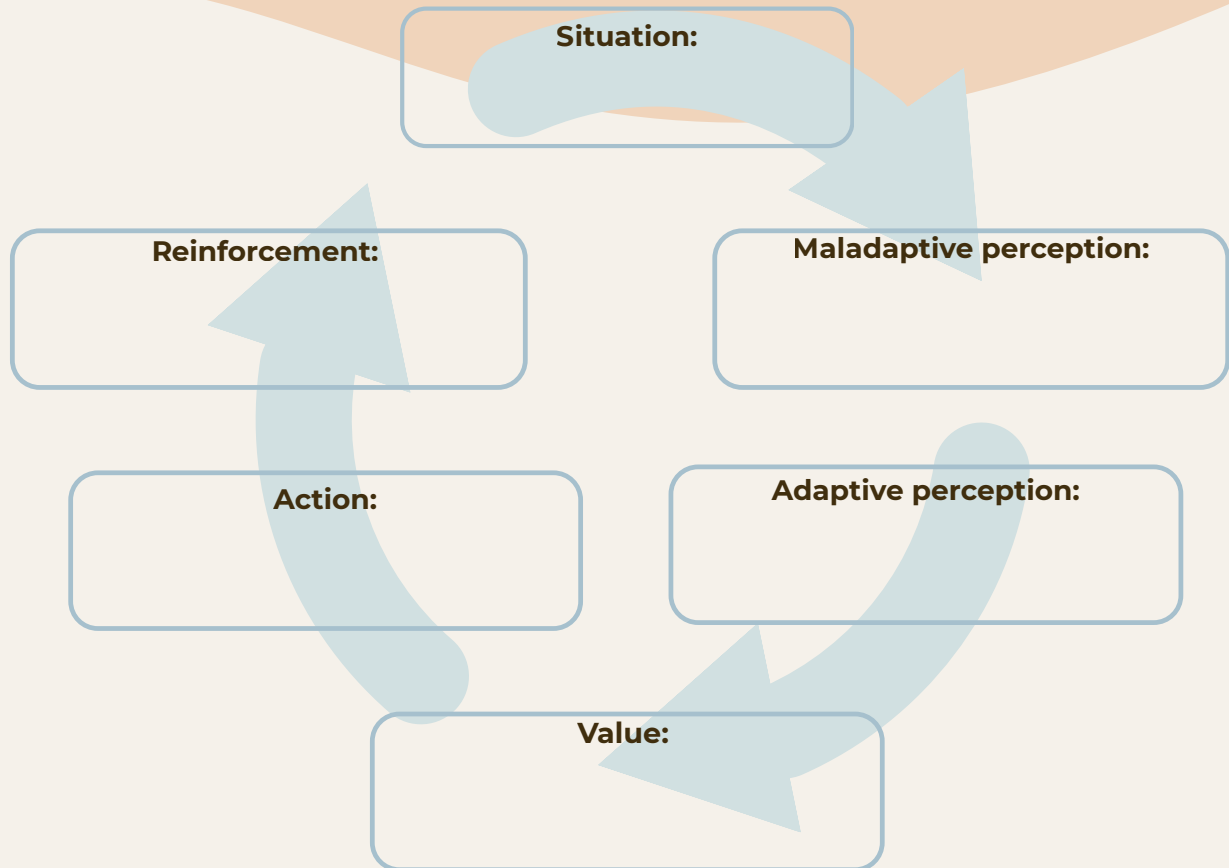
## Growth and self development



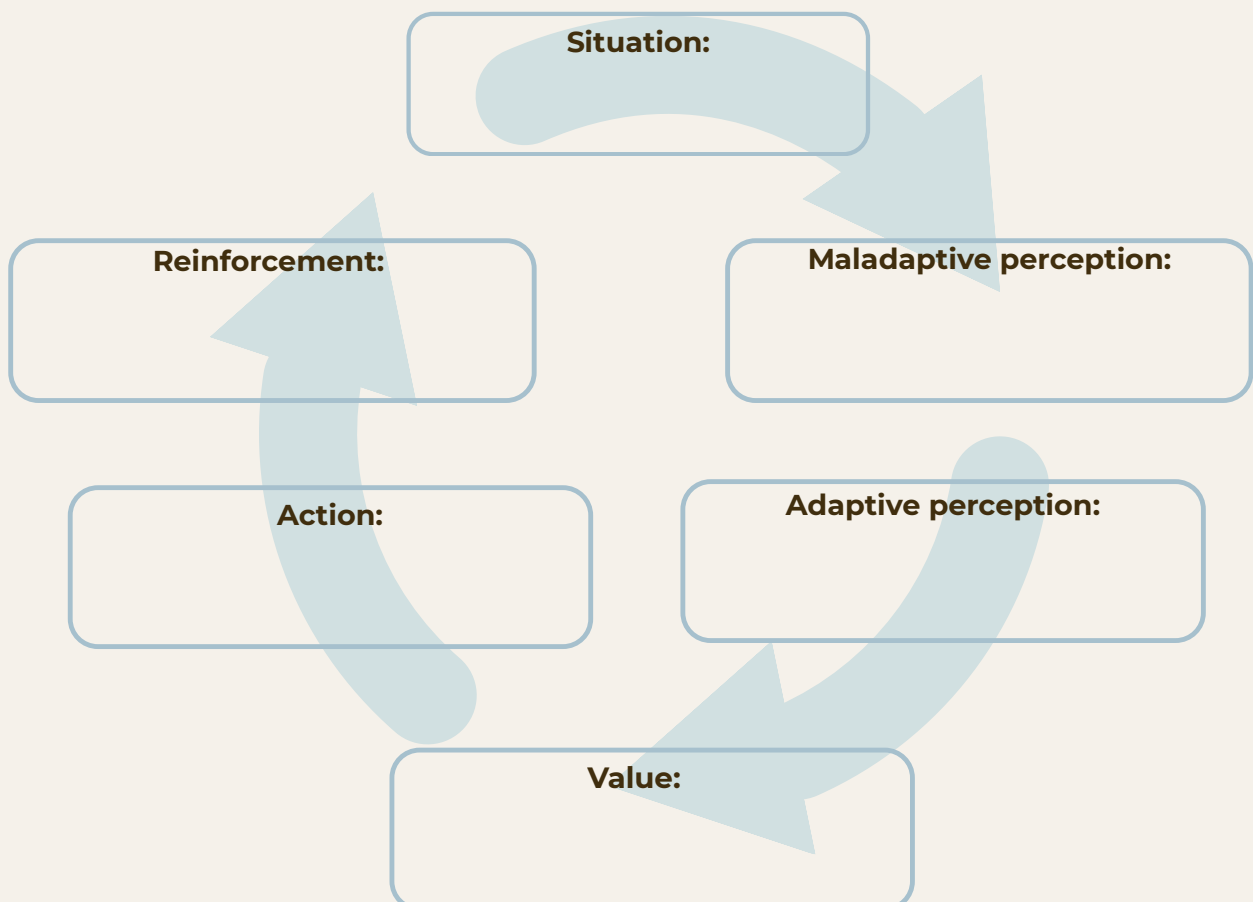
## Relationships and connections



## Health and well-being



## Purpose and contribution



# 03 Helping yourself by helping others

Researchers have found that a good way to alleviate feelings of loneliness is to do good for others. Helping shifts your focus from yourself to the needs of others, and doing selfless good deeds voluntarily can help you feel needed and relevant. Altruism and volunteering is linked to some aspects of the "purpose and contribution" category discussed above.

## Exercise 3

Is there anyone close to you who would be delighted to have you contact them, visit them, or invite them for a coffee, a walk, or any other activity? Have a look at your network exercise in chapter 4. Who in your network do you want to contact? Write down their names and an activity you could plan with them.

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- If you feel up to it, contact them to make plans.

Have you ever considered volunteering for something that would allow you to help others in a way that suits you? If so, do a little research and write down 3 organizations you can contact in the future.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# 04 Expectations and Disappointments

What do you feel when you think about actively pursuing deeper connections? Over the course of this workbook, you may have already tried to step out of your comfort zone, maybe by reaching out to someone you wouldn't have talked to before, making casual conversation with strangers, or consciously replacing negative beliefs about yourself with more neutral ones. How did it feel to take those steps? Was it easier to connect with people knowing all that you've learned about loneliness? Take a moment to reflect on these experiences.

If you haven't taken direct action yet, there is no need to worry. In this chapter we will dive into practical ways of interacting with people, keeping in mind how stressful that may seem to us when we are feeling lonely. Regardless of whether you are looking for brand new relationships or are anxious to deepen the ones you already have, the key to taking action is to EASE yourself into this process. In this chapter, you will learn how to put your knowledge of loneliness and of your own needs into practice.



## The EASE acronym outlines four helpful principles of overcoming loneliness

**E = Extend yourself.** It is the small interactions we have with people every day. It is a smile and a nod. It is checking in with a friend. It is reframing your negative thoughts to approach others without dread. It is all these little things, which summed up, make us feel more connected.

**A = Action plan.** It is the realization that you have power over your loneliness. You can control your thoughts and expectations. You can shape your social environment and decide where to invest your energy. Making an action plan requires 3 steps:

- Identify a goal you want to achieve.
- Brainstorm ways you can get to your goal. Plan small tasks. They do not have to be related to one another and can be very different from each other.
- Order the tasks from easiest to most challenging.

Remember to be patient with yourself when implementing the steps.

**S = Selection.** It means knowing your needs and recognizing when others can and cannot meet them. It is letting go of one-sided attempts at connection and nourishing those in which both parties build each other up mutually.

**E = Expect the Best.** This is something to carry with you in any social interaction you engage in. Allow yourself to trust that the people you know or meet will respond warmly as long as you remain open to them. You're probably thinking that is an unrealistic expectation, and you are right. Nonetheless, you cannot know anyone until you interact with them, and assuming friendliness will take you a long way. Keeping in mind that not all situations and crowds will be easy for us to be in, it is also crucial not to dwell on "mistakes" or awkwardness we occasionally experience along the way. It is perfectly normal to feel odd in a social situation from time to time. Giving yourself the space to accept that and move on is immensely helpful when opening up to others.

Keep those key points in mind as you complete the exercises of this chapter and remember them in your social interactions.



# 05 Chapter completion exercises

How can you utilize these (new) insights? There are going to be a series of exercises you repeat throughout your journey. They are there for you to evaluate how much progress you feel you are making and identify what is helping you to make progress. If you feel that questions are not applicable yet or that you are not confident about reflecting on, do not worry. Remember, this journey has ups and downs and that is perfectly fine, try to also identify when you feel down and think about the why when you can.

On the following scale: How lonely do you feel, with 10 being as lonely as when you began your journey and 1 being not lonely at all?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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## Pause to analyze

What events have changed your status for better or worse during this chapter?

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What is your main take-away from this chapter?

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How can this help you reach your ideal goal formed in chapter 1?

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# Chapter 6

Going out there?

# 01 Background

The biggest part of fighting loneliness lies in the reflections and exercises you have completed in chapters 1-5. These are the tools designed to let you build your social network by yourself. In Chapter 6, you will learn how to implement them in practice.

You might be familiar with the phrase “putting yourself out there,” used often as vague advice given to those of us who are lonely. While it is not entirely false, there are a few additional tips, which can make this idea more effective and less overwhelming.

- In chapter 4, you examined your social network looking for relationships which you would like to deepen and areas of life in which you would like to meet more people. Focus on those when making a plan of action.
- Also remember the exercises of Chapter 5. What were your main priorities? How can those be incorporated into your plan? Think about activities which speak to your values and natural preferences or interests, like sports, book clubs, family time, church groups, volunteering, computer games or many more.
- Make sure that the people you choose are ready to reciprocate the relationship. If you find yourself running into a wall with someone despite your best attempts, it might be best to turn to a person more willing to meet you halfway.
- You do not have to be an expert in the topic of conversation. Ask for explanations when you are unsure instead of closing yourself off.
- Find common ground: tell people about your interests, hobbies and everyday life and look for shared interests

Now that we have established some effective ways to go out there and connect, it is time to put it into practice. Many times, doing honorable deeds and spending time with others can help reduce loneliness by giving purpose and empowering yourself. Sometimes just chatting with others is sufficient to make a difference in both your and someone else’s day.

## Exercise 1

So, let us try it. Go out there in the next few days and ask someone on your map from Chapter 4 out to grab a coffee, go to the library or just spend some time doing something else with someone. Take your network overview and see if there are any common interests or needs with people in your network. You might find someone you can do something with. If you do not feel like anyone in your social network is suitable for this, try meeting new people. Here is a list of places where you could perform these activities and meet new people:

### For art enthusiasts:

- Book clubs
- Museums
- Music centers
- Cultural centers
- Art centers

### For sport/nature enthusiasts:

- Sports/Hobby clubs
- Parks
- Community centers
- Swimming pools
- Gardening initiatives

### For history enthusiasts:

- Tourist destinations
- History tours
- Libraries

- At the end of the workbook, you can find a list of organisations in Maastricht that you can consider joining.

Write down your experiences here:

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## 02 Active listening

Active listening is more than just hearing someone's words, it's about being present, showing genuine interest, and engaging meaningfully. By going beyond surface-level conversations, you can create stronger, more meaningful connections.

When someone shares something significant, avoid a quick response like, "That's unfortunate." Instead, take the time to ask how the situation has affected them emotionally, what it means to them, and how it has impacted their life. This approach shows that you truly care and helps foster deeper bonds.



## **Tips for Active Listening**

### **1. Pay attention to Your Listening Posture**

- Face the speaker and position your body to show engagement. Use small verbal cues, like “Yes,” “I see,” or “Hmm,” to indicate you’re actively listening.

### **2. Ask Follow-Up Questions**

- If there’s something you don’t fully understand, ask for clarification or more details. This shows you’re interested and invested in what they’re sharing.

### **3. Explore Their Emotional Experience**

- Go beyond the facts and ask about their feelings. For example:
  - “How did that make you feel?”
  - “What impact has that had on you?”

### **4. Use Open-Ended Questions**

- Encourage more detailed responses by starting questions with “What,” “How,” “Who,” or “Where.” For instance:
  - “What has this experience been like for you?”
  - “How are you coping with everything?”

### **5. Remember Details and Refer Back Later**

- Show you value what the other person shared by referencing details from past conversations. If needed, jot down key points to help you remember.

By practicing these techniques, you can build trust, create more meaningful conversations, and strengthen your social connections.

## Exercise 2

Now let us put it into practice. Meet up with someone who you have previously established a connection with. Similar to exercise 1 of this chapter do an activity together. Try and implement this into your conversation.

Write down your experiences here:

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# 03 Chapter completion exercises

How can you utilize these (new) insights? There are going to be a series of exercises you repeat throughout your journey. They are there for you to evaluate how much progress you feel you are making and identify what is helping you to make progress. If you feel that questions are not applicable yet or that you are not confident about reflecting on, do not worry. Remember, this journey has ups and downs and that is perfectly fine, try to also identify when you feel down and think about the why when you can.

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## Pause to analyze

What events have changed your status for better or worse during this chapter?

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What is your main take-away from this chapter?

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How can this help you reach your ideal goal formed in chapter 1?

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# Conclusion

# 01 Afterword

This workbook has covered a great deal of information. Chapter 1 dealt with the definitions and types of loneliness. In this chapter, you formed an ideal goal that you wanted to reach. Chapter 2 explored how thoughts influence loneliness and vice versa. You covered maladaptive and adaptive thinking cycles and took control of your thought patterns. Then you moved to a short analysis of your current personal situation, and how you want it to look in the future. To do this, you examined your social network more closely in chapter 4 to identify specific relationships that you can and want to work on. Then you learned how you can best work on these relationships. You learned that you should EASE yourself into social connections while keeping your values in mind to make those interactions more fulfilling. Lastly, you gained some practical tips to help you in any interactions.

After completing these exercises, you may feel ready to make some new or more meaningful connections- or you may not. It is important to remember that overcoming loneliness is not a straight path. Feelings like loneliness fluctuate. There will be times where you experience more connection and times where you notice that you need to "freshen up" your skills to tackle loneliness.

That is precisely what this workbook is for- so make it your own. You can repeat exercises when you discover new thought cycles and consolidate behaviors you are already working on. You can make new goals concerning interactions with others and work towards them. At any stage in your journey to overcoming loneliness, this book can be used as a tool in the ways that best suit you: You can pick which exercises you find helpful and do those or simply refer to a chapter for some information. Do not forget that repetition strengthens thought and action patterns- Practice makes perfect!

One last heart-felt advice: Please remember to be patient and kind to yourself. Celebrate your efforts and progress- no matter how small! Use this book to overcome setbacks and continue to reflect on how you are doing, where you are and where you want to be.

Happy Connecting!

# 02 Further reading and research

## References and further reading:

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- Hari, J. (2018). *Lost connections: Uncovering the real causes of depression – and the unexpected solutions*. Bloomsbury.
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## Web-Based Resources and Organizations:

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- Mental Health America. (n.d.). Loneliness and social isolation. <https://www.mhanational.org/loneliness-and-social-isolation>

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- Murthy, V. H. (2020). How to connect in a disconnected world [Video]. TED Conversations.  
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The School of Life. (n.d.). Loneliness [Video & Articles].  
<https://www.theschooloflife.com>

## **Organisations in and around Maastricht**

### Volunteering

- Serve the city (<https://www.stcmaastricht.nl>)
- VVV Maastricht (<http://www.vvvmaastricht.nl/>)
- Meetup Book Clubs (<https://www.meetup.com/find/nl--maastricht/bookclub/>)

### Networking & Hobbies

- Local meetup.com networking group
- Expat Centre Maastricht (<https://www.expatscentremaastrichtregion.nl>)
- NOAH friendship platform (<https://www.stcmaastricht.nl/noah/>)
- Networking events of Maastrichter.com
- GGI (Girl Gone International) facebook group
- The Social Map of the municipality of Maastricht (<https://www.socialekaartmaastricht.nl/themas/eenzaamheid>) offers a regularly updated overview of almost all local initiatives designed to connect the citizens of Maastricht (although currently only available in Dutch, use a translation app in case of doubt)

### Sports & Fitness (affordable and with group classes)

- UM Sports
- Maastricht Sport: <http://www.maastrichtsport.nl/>

### Community & Cultural Centers

- Buurtcentrum De Romein
- Stichting Buurtcentrum Daalhof: <http://www.buurtcentrumdaalhof.nl/>
- The Social Map of the municipality of Maastricht (<https://www.socialekaartmaastricht.nl/themas/eenzaamheid>) offers a regularly updated overview of Maastricht's community and cultural centers

Image References:

Pictures: <https://www.istockphoto.com/nl/search/2/image?phrase=>

# Notes

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**The Connected Path** is a practical and compassionate workbook designed to help readers take the first meaningful steps toward reconnection—with others and with themselves. Created by Serve the City Maastricht and rooted in both academic research and over a decade of community-building experience in Maastricht, this guide offers its audience tools to understand loneliness, overcome barriers, and build lasting, authentic relationships.

Inside, readers will find:

- **Insightful reflections** on what loneliness is and how it affects us
- **Guided exercises** to grow self-awareness and build confidence in connecting with others
- **Progress checkpoints** to help the reader track their growth and discover what truly works for them

The Connected Path offers a supportive, step-by-step approach that individuals can engage with at their own pace. Its adaptable format ensures that users—regardless of background or stage in their journey—can find guidance, build confidence, and take meaningful steps toward reconnection and improved well-being.

**Reconnection starts here.**

