

Worksheet for Teachers: Lesson C

Lesson Title: *Loneliness and Ageism at Various Stages of Life*

Lesson objectives: The objective of the lesson is to reflect with pupils on the topics of *loneliness and aloneness*, enabling them to recognize the differences and similarities between them, and to inform them about what ageism is, how it manifests itself, how it is related to feelings of loneliness and what the consequences of experiencing loneliness can be on life. Pupils gain awareness by reproducing existing knowledge of the topic and then reflecting on it and synthesising the new knowledge from the video with their own experience. The objective of the lesson is to introduce pupils to the issue of loneliness and explain ageism as a concept involving stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) against others or ourselves on the basis of age. The lesson will stimulate the pupils during the planning of a joint project to counteract feelings of loneliness in older age and to help create quality social contacts. It also promotes active citizenship and language learning. The lesson can be used in project-based teaching.

Length and outline of the lesson: 90+ min (reflective worksheet, instructional video, discussion about the video, thought exercises in pairs/groups of three, joint project, brainstorming)

Aids: working materials, internet, projector to watch the video, optionally coloured markers and large sheets of papers for a joint project

Procedure:

1. REFLECTING: Pupils work independently or in small groups with a reflective worksheet that leads to contemplating and reflecting on the concepts of aloneness and loneliness. The individual questions aim at the development of critical thinking in the pupils through the so-called cubing method:

DESCRIBE - *Write down a situation when you felt alone but felt good, and when you felt lonely and these feelings were unpleasant for you.*

COMPARE - *How are these two experiences different from each other? In which ways do you see similarities?*

RECALL/ASSOCIATE - *What comes to your mind when you hear the word loneliness?*

ANALYSE - *What in your opinion can feelings of loneliness bring about?*

APPLY - *Suggest how negative feelings of loneliness can be prevented. How would you prevent them?*

ARGUE - *What makes you decide to be alone sometimes?*

2. VIDEO: The class watches a video together about aloneness and loneliness in younger and older age (21 minutes): (Why Are We So Lonely? - Glad You Asked S1).

This teaching material was developed within the GENPATH project (TAČR TJ03000002) with the support of

The video is in English (Czech subtitles can be enabled by selecting 'automatic translation'): 'We often have a lot of opinions and assumptions about the things that make us lonely. Why is it, then, that half of the American population reports feeling lonely on a regular basis?' The video is hosted by the young presenters Alex Clark and Christophe Haubursin, who also talk about their own experiences of loneliness. YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EidKl1Bdons>

3. DISCUSSION ABOUT THE VIDEO:

- 1) The video presented the experience of feeling lonely by people of different ages. Recall what situations or life events have been mentioned as significant triggers for feelings of loneliness?
E.g. finishing college and losing contact with friends from school, retirement
- 2) Can you think of any other situations in life that may pose a risk in terms of feelings of loneliness?
E.g. loss of job, leaving school, moving to another town, death in the family
- 3) The video presented the experience of loneliness of several age groups. Do you think loneliness can be associated with age? In which way?

4. LONELINESS AND AGEISM (NOT ONLY) IN OLDER AGE:

- 1) Do you know an older person in your neighbourhood who might feel lonely? Why do you think he/she is lonely? What would trigger his/her loneliness?
- 2) In the context of older age, people sometimes talk of ageism - stereotyping and discrimination based on age. Ageism is not just about older age, but about all ages, and it can be found everywhere around us. Perhaps you yourself have encountered someone not taking you or someone you know seriously because of your age, not wanting to listen to you, refusing to work with you, talking to you, etc.

Try doing a short **thought exercise**. Think of a situation where someone mentioned your age as a negative point: e.g. 'young people don't know anything', 'you can't know anything about it yet, you are too young', 'politics/debate is not for the young, they shouldn't be involved', etc. In pairs/group of threes, share such experiences.

Now replace the younger age with the older age. Have you encountered stereotypes about age being directed at older people in your community? E.g. 'you're too old for that', 'you're already old, what can you know about that' etc. What kind of situations were these? How do you think it made the person feel?

Objective of the exercise: Ageism is a significant structural source of loneliness, because if we are or consider ourselves to be victims of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination, it causes us to feel alienated from society and close relationships. However, each of us sometimes succumbs to stereotypes and prejudice ourselves, and then we forget to listen to others and ask what their feelings and needs are, failing to see the person in his/her uniqueness. Since both the younger and older generations are among the frequent victims of ageism, we can use this shared experience to foster intergenerational empathy and understanding.

5. JOINT PROJECT

Divide the class into larger groups (5-6 pupils), give them sheets of paper (preferably A3 or A2), coloured markers and set them the following task:

- 1) 'You are a team that has been tasked by your town to devise a project that will promote the involvement of local older residents in community life and/or help deal with possible feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Use what you already know about loneliness and your own experience of it, or prepare a mind map. You have unlimited financial and staff resources, but it should be feasible to implement the project in a town or village of your choice in the Czech Republic. You can take inspiration from projects that you know already exist somewhere in your area or were carried out in the past.'

Project structure:

- Project name
 - Who is it for (*Is it limited in any way? Is it only for people of a certain age/gender?*)
 - What exactly is needed for its implementation (*are there any special requirements for the venue? - wheelchair accessibility, proximity to toilets; food, for example, including options for diabetics and people with dentures, etc.*)
 - What activities it involves (*organising sending letters to older people, setting up a phone line for people feeling lonely, cooking a community meal, reading together, etc.*)
 - What the final project result looks like
- 2) Demonstrate the project to the class in a short presentation. You can use the outline in the materials. The class will then reflect on the questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project?
- Would you add to or modify the project in any way?

Objective of the exercise: The joint evaluation of projects should not lead to looking for the best solution, but to the realisation that every step taken towards people who experience feelings of loneliness can help to improve their lives and experiences. When developing a project, it is very likely that pupils will be working with some of their own stereotypes and prejudices, but if these prejudices are reflected, then they can help us to become aware of the specific requirements of a diverse older population, which in effect, for example, will help to improve the service provided, reach the target group, etc.

6. BRAINSTORMING: Where to Find Help, Who to Contact

The materials for pupils include links to two instructional videos - one longer that they have seen in class and a shorter one that deals with general information about loneliness; and a Czech "Nonviolent Communication Podcast" on relationships, communication and conflicts presented by Masaryk University lecturers. It also lists **examples of websites, helplines and organisations** that have been dealing with loneliness issues among teenagers and older people on a long term basis.

The teacher can first **encourage the pupils to brainstorm**, 'Where can you go for advice and help in the Czech Republic?' (*psychologists in the school/city/country, helplines as well as mental health and well-being organizations, etc.*)

Subsequently, after reflecting together, show the pupils the sites and help them to familiarise themselves with them. Then, near the end of the lesson, hand out or send out the last worksheet that contains the information. If pupils have someone in their neighbourhood who is in a similar situation, they can make use of these guides, tools and helplines.

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Task 1: Think about the questions and then try to answer them briefly in a few sentences:

1. Try to recall and write about a situation when you felt alone but felt good, and when you felt lonely and these feelings were unpleasant for you.
2. How are these two experiences different from each other? In which ways do you see similarities?
3. What comes to your mind when you hear the word loneliness?
4. What in your opinion can feelings of loneliness bring about?
5. Suggest how negative feelings of loneliness can be prevented. How would you prevent them?
6. What makes you decide to be alone sometimes?



Task 2:

You are a team that has been tasked by your town to devise a project that will promote the involvement of local older residents in community life and/or help deal with possible feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Use what you already know about loneliness and your own experience of it, or prepare a mind map. You have unlimited financial and staff resources, but it should be feasible to implement the project in a town or village of your choice in the Czech Republic. You can take inspiration from projects that you know already exist somewhere in your area or were carried out in the past.'

Project structure:

- Project name
- Who is it for (*Is it limited in any way? Is it only for people of a certain age/gender? Is it an intergenerational meeting?*)
- What exactly is needed for its implementation (*If it involves a meeting, are there any special requirements for the venue? - wheelchair accessibility, proximity to toilets; food, for example, including options for diabetics and people with dentures, when is the best time of the day/week to hold it etc.*)
- What activities it involves (*organising sending letters to older people, setting up a phone line for people feeling lonely, cooking a community meal, reading together, etc.*)
- What the final project result looks like

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Help: Be creative and sensitive to the physical needs of older people. Use your own experience in organising space and activities for people with, for example, physical limitations.

Demonstrate the project to the class in a short presentation. You can use the outline in the materials. The class will then reflect on the questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project?
- Would you add to or modify the project in any way?



INFORMATION AND IMPORTANT REFERENCES

1) Video: Loneliness (in English with Czech subtitles) - Kurzgesagt - In a Nutshell: 'Everyone feels lonely sometimes. However, few realize how important this feeling was to our ancestors - and that our modern world can turn this into something that really hurts us.'

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3Xv_g3g-mA

2) Video: Why Are We So Lonely? - Glad You Asked S1, in English with English subtitles, 'We often have a lot of opinions and assumptions about the things that make us lonely. Why is it, then, that half of the American population reports feeling lonely on a regular basis?'

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EidKl1Bdons&t=529s>

3) Non-violent Communication Podcast: a podcast by Petr Holík and Petr Sucháček about effective, open and empathetic communication based on the method of non-violent communication.

Link: <https://ceskepodcasty.cz/podcasty/nenasilny-podcast>

WHERE TO GO FOR ADVICE AND HELP?

- **Nevypust' duši (Don't Lose Your Soul):** The site provides useful links and contacts; information about loneliness and such; guidelines on what to do in crisis situations; tools showing how to confide in others and how to listen; support programmes and exercises; contacts to psychological counselling and much more.

More information: <https://nevypustdusi.cz/infografika/>

- **Poradna Linky bezpečí (Advice Helpline) (tel. 116 111):** This helpline can be contacted free of charge by children, young people and students up to the age of 26 if they need someone to talk to safely about feelings of loneliness, sadness, fear and much more. The helpline is open non-stop day and night; its team members are happy to listen and will try to give you advice and help.

More information: <https://www.linkabezpeci.cz/poradna/skola-a-kamaradi/osamelost/>

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- **Elpida Senior Citizens' Line (tel. 800 200 007):** Elpida operates a free senior citizens' line providing anonymous telephone and email crisis assistance not only for seniors, but also for those caring for seniors and people in crisis. In a safe space it is possible to share feelings and experiences of loneliness, loss, aging, but also issues of caring for the older persons in the family and the demanding life situations associated with it
More information: <https://www.elpida.cz/linka-senioru-zavolejte-nam>
- **Senior Telephone Helpline (tel. 800 157 157):** The Život90 organisation has set up a free helpline for seniors and their carers who need help in dealing with an urgent or adverse social situation, or just need a safe anonymous place to share their feelings.
More information: <https://www.zivot90.cz/cs/asistence/senior-telefon>
- **How to deal with loneliness alone? (ŽIVOT 90):** This series of 4 videos presents loneliness from various angles. You will gain a brief insight into the theory of loneliness and you can try exercises that can help you at least a little with your feelings of loneliness. The videos are presented by Tereza Hacová.
More information: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aIXRiyZ-Bs>