

Samaritans Scotland – providing a listening ear throughout the pandemic

Samaritans continues to be there to listen, for FREE, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week thanks to our dedicated volunteers

Understanding our callers during the COVID-19 pandemic

At Samaritans we have regularly surveyed our volunteers to better understand the issues facing our callers during the pandemic.

- In the first three months of lockdown Samaritans provided emotional support over half a million times.
- While 1 in 4 conversations mentioned coronavirus as a main concern, our volunteers say the crisis is affecting all callers in some way and report higher levels of anxiety, loneliness and isolation.

It is clear Covid-19 is affecting everyone – but it isn't affecting everyone in the same way. We are particularly concerned about three groups:

Middle aged men

- During the first three months of lockdown, 3 in 10 contacts to Samaritans from men included concerns about loneliness or isolation, up 20% compared to the same time last year. Among men who were specifically concerned about Covid-19, loneliness or isolation rises to be a concern in almost half (46%) of contacts from men.

Young people

- Young people appear to be particularly affected by the loss of contact with friends, often in conjunction with tense relationships with family they're living with. And even as lockdown was relaxed, young people continued to say they feel lonely frequently, as they continue to be isolated from their peers.

People with pre-existing mental health conditions

- During the first three months of lockdown, most volunteers spoke to callers whose existing mental health conditions were being made worse because of the restrictions. Depression, anxiety and OCD are some of the mental health conditions our callers have reported being heightened. Most volunteers spoke to callers who were struggling to access mental health services during lockdown.

COVID-19 and suicide risk

- While it is too early to know the effect of COVID-19 on suicide rates, and it is important to remember that a rise in suicide rates is not inevitable, the pandemic is having an impact on factors we know are related to suicide risk. Negative thoughts about the future, loss, lacking social support, rumination, and feelings of burdensomeness came up often in conversations with our callers.

Our response

As well as providing our phone and email service 24/7, we have

- Launched a new self-help app
- Developed new support resources on our website
- Partnered the Scottish Government's Clear Your Head campaign
- Influenced the Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan
- Supported the development of the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group approach to Covid-19

Samaritans continues to be there for everyone in Scotland, 24/7, 365 days a year thanks to the dedication of our Listening Volunteers.

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