

NEWS LESSON

Is the News Making Us Lonelier?

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Where did you learn what to expect from time alone?
2. Is it easier to be alone at home or in public?
3. Can you feel lonely in a room full of people?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**annoyed**	☐	A	to see the difference between two things
2	**flat**	☐	B	dull, without energy or interest
3	**journalism**	☐	C	causing sadness or hurt
4	**beneficial**	☐	D	to talk until people agree
5	**isolated**	☐	E	a little angry
6	**painful**	☐	F	far away from other people
7	**distinguish**	☐	G	the work of writing news for papers and websites
8	**negotiate**	☐	H	good for you or useful

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A study found that articles about being alone are ten times more likely to call it harmful than helpful, and that what people believe predicts how solitude actually feels to them.

1 Your plans fall through. For a second you cannot tell whether you are annoyed or relieved. You were looking forward to seeing your friend, and yet an evening with the remote control and nobody to negotiate with suddenly sounds rather good.

2 A week later the identical empty evening feels flat and lonely. Nothing in the room has changed. Your experience of it has. That gap is why psychologists distinguish between being alone, which is a circumstance, and loneliness, which is the uncomfortable feeling that the connection you want is missing.

3 A 2025 study in Nature Communications, by researchers at the University of Michigan, asked where our expectations about solitude come from, and the answer was unflattering to journalism. The team analysed 144 American newspaper articles published between 2020 and 2022. Solitude was presented negatively almost throughout. The articles were roughly ten times more likely to describe being alone as harmful than as beneficial.

4 That matters because of what the researchers found next. In daily-life studies, people who believed that being alone was bad for them reported more loneliness after spending time by themselves. People with more positive beliefs reported less. Comparing countries produced the same pattern: where loneliness was higher, beliefs about solitude were more negative. In a randomised experiment, simply reading material about the benefits of being alone shifted people's beliefs in a positive direction.

5 The authors do not overclaim. Their everyday studies are not experiments, so they cannot establish that beliefs cause loneliness, and they accept that the influence may run both ways. Feeling lonely is a perfectly good reason to think badly of an empty evening.

6 There is no shortage of advice about spending time alone well, and some of it quietly turns rest into another task. You are invited to meditate, journal, start a hobby and return improved. The research points somewhere simpler. An afternoon with no agenda at all, walking without counting the distance or cooking exactly what you feel like, appears to do the job.

7 A separate paper published in 2026 approaches the same territory from another angle. Writing in Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science, a team of Czech researchers argues that solitude and loneliness are not divided by how physically isolated you are, but by motivation. Time alone that you chose, for reasons that are yours, tends to be restorative. Time alone that was imposed on you tends not to be.

8 None of this means loneliness is a misunderstanding. It is painful, and telling somebody to enjoy their own company is not an answer to it. But if an empty evening arrives, it may be worth noticing how much of your reaction was decided before it started.

Sources: Nature Communications, How people think about being alone shapes their experience of loneliness; Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science, Time Alone: Solitude and Loneliness from the Self-Determining Perspective. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The article suggests that the same evening can feel different from one week to the next. T F NG
2. The researchers found that reading about the benefits of being alone had no effect on beliefs. T F NG
3. The article says loneliness is only a misunderstanding. T F NG
4. Most of the people in the daily-life studies were under thirty. T F NG
5. The study found a pattern across countries, but it cannot show which came first. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

agenda	expectations	imposed	overclaim	passport	randomised	rehearsal	relieved

1. When the dinner was cancelled, she was _____ to have a quiet night.
2. Newspaper coverage can shape our _____ about what time alone will feel like.
3. In a _____ experiment, people are placed in groups by chance.
4. Good scientists do not _____ their findings, because small studies prove little.
5. A rule _____ by a manager feels different from one you choose yourself.
6. Check the _____ before the meeting so you know what will be discussed.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Nothing in the room has _____ . (CHANGE)
2. By the time her friend cancelled, she _____ the tickets. (BUY)
3. The 144 articles _____ by the research team. (ANALYSE)
4. The authors _____ that the influence may run both ways. (ACCEPT)
5. Their everyday studies cannot _____ that beliefs cause loneliness. (ESTABLISH)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many nouns and adjectives take a fixed preposition, such as shortage of or to blame for. Learn the whole phrase.

against by for of on to with

1. There is no shortage _____ advice online about spending time alone.
2. She was looking forward _____ a quiet evening with a book.
3. The study was based _____ 144 newspaper articles.
4. Solitude and loneliness are divided _____ motivation, not isolation.
5. The authors say beliefs may be to blame _____ some of the loneliness.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. The study found articles were ten times more likely to call solitude harmful. Does that match what you read?
2. The Czech researchers say choice is what separates solitude from loneliness. Do you agree?
3. Would reading about the benefits of being alone change how you feel about it?

9 Role-play: a cancelled evening

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the flatmate who wants a quiet night

Your friend cancelled your plans for tonight. You're delighted and want to stay in alone. Your flatmate wants company. Explain why time alone matters to you and suggest a fair compromise.

Student B · the flatmate who wants company

Your plans for tonight have fallen through and you feel a little lonely. Ask your flatmate to do something together. Explain why, and listen to their reasons.

Useful phrases

I was really looking forward to a quiet night.

It's not that I don't like your company.

Could we do something together tomorrow instead?

I'd rather spend the evening on my own.

I don't want you to feel lonely.

How about a short walk and then I'm yours?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a plan, and who gave way more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 B · 3 G · 4 H · 5 F · 6 C · 7 A · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 relieved · 2 expectations · 3 randomised · 4 overclaim · 5 imposed · 6 agenda

6 Verb forms

1 changed · 2 had bought · 3 were analysed · 4 accept · 5 establish

7 Language focus

1 of · 2 to · 3 on · 4 by · 5 for

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