

BARCELONA CONTRA LA SOLEDAT

**THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES:
CO-CREATION WORKSHOPS
ON LONELINESS AND
CHILDHOOD**



**Ajuntament de
Barcelona**

THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES: CO-CREATION WORKSHOPS ON LONELINESS AND CHILDHOOD

DIRECTOR

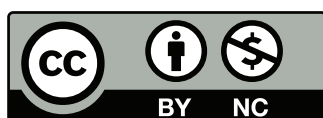
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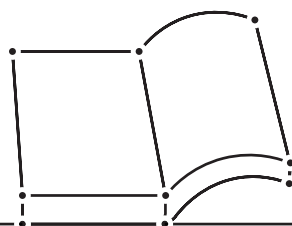


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PILLARS OF CONCEPTUALISATION

INTRODUCTION

Barcelona is one of the many cities in the world that have needed to combat loneliness among their residents through initiatives that aim to strengthen ties between people or create new ones, to rethink urban planning so that it can be an effective tool for making people feel welcome and accompanied, and to use new technologies, innovation and research to improve social well-being.

In an effort to overcome the challenges posed by loneliness, Barcelona City Council has put together the Municipal Strategy for Combatting Loneliness 2020-2030, in order to promote solid, lasting relationships and ensure all citizens' welfare, in line with the 2030 Agenda SDGs.

In terms of the groups we work with, a decision was made to look at loneliness from children's perspective, with a view to drawing conclusions on how they experience it, how they suffer from it and how they can stamp it out. A perspective that would allow us to co-create with them, and examine what we should know, do and feel about loneliness.

So, this is a participatory project which, through participation and an active, central role for citizens and the social agents involved, should help us to deduce the following, from a child's point of view:

- For the people who feel lonely. What they should **know** (relevant information), what they should **do** (use of their own and external resources) and what they should **feel** (that they are not alone and there are many people out there they can trust).
- For the people who do not feel lonely. What they should know about the issue, so that they are more aware (**know**). How they can provide company to someone close – or not so close – to them (**do**). How they can generate empathy, generosity and compassion towards people who are experiencing loneliness (**feel**). All of us can feel lonely at some point or another in our lives.

ACTION COORDINATED WITH THE WORK BEING DONE BY THE CITY COUNCIL

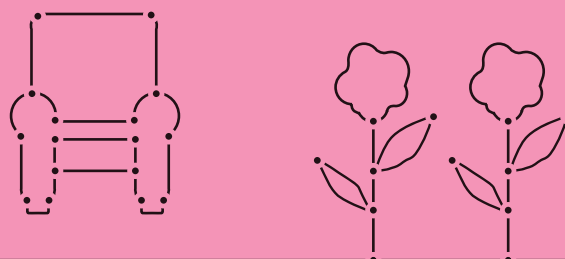
In order to carry out this work in coordination with the City Council, we have linked this project to the participatory process initiated through the Decidim platform.

"Loneliness has become a problem in societies worldwide, to the extent that it has even been called one of the epidemics of the twenty-first century. The stigmatisation of loneliness is often negatively associated with social isolation, which has resulted in only the most extreme cases being visible, such as older people dying alone. But loneliness is a subjective, unwanted feeling of lack or loss of company, and it occurs when there is a disparity between the quantity and quality of the social relationships we have and those that we would like. It can therefore affect anyone, of any age, sex, gender or origin. The Strategy is designed both to offer resources to people who are experiencing a situation of chronic loneliness and, perhaps most importantly, to strengthen social ties in order to prevent loneliness among people of any age, sex, gender or origin in the city. The Municipal Strategy for Combatting Loneliness seeks to empower people by expanding their network of social and family relationships or removing any deficits in it, as well as strengthening the pact for social cohesion'. Decidim Barcelona.

Having observed the participatory process, we decided to incorporate **two aspects of it** into the central concepts of the proposal:

The first was **the questions put to citizens**, which were transformed to be child-friendly:

1. How can we reach people who feel lonely and cannot or do not know how to recognise or express that they feel this way? || Is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?
2. How can we promote social ties in the city, given the particularities of each neighbourhood, in order to reduce loneliness among the most vulnerable groups,



especially young people and older people? || How do you think your city could make people feel less lonely? Do you think there are people of certain ages or in certain situations who might feel more lonely than others?

3. How can public and municipal spaces incentivise relationships and interaction between people?

DECIDIM BARCELONA

Reaching people who are lonely: proposals to reach people who feel lonely and cannot or do not know how to recognise or express that they feel this way.

Promoting social ties: proposals to promote social ties in the city, given the particularities of each neighbourhood, in order to reduce loneliness among the most vulnerable groups, especially young people and older people (so that they know they are not alone and there are many people out there they can trust).

Public spaces that incentivise relationships: proposals regarding how public and municipal spaces can incentivise relationships and interaction between people.

Other reflections: other proposals not covered in the categories above.

|| Think about a perfect city where no one feels lonely. What does it look like?

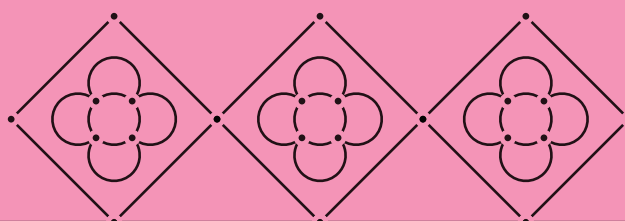
The second was a connection between the four cornerstones of participation involved in the Decidim Barcelona process and those linked to the project's objective:

BARCELONA AGAINST LONELINESS THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES

For the people who feel lonely. What they should know (relevant information), what they should do (use of their own and external resources) and what they should feel (that they are not alone and there are many people out there they can trust).

For the people who do not feel lonely. What they should know about the issue, so that they are more aware (know). How they can provide company to someone close – or not so close – to them (do). How they can generate empathy, generosity and compassion towards people who are experiencing loneliness (feel). All of us can feel lonely at some point or another in our lives.

In this area, we have taken into account the film **My Extraordinary Summer with Tess**, with which Barcelona City Council has been working, so that we can find a common, coordinated language.



BENEFICIARIES

This action has involved participation from children aged between 6 and 14 and a group of young people aged up to 21. The participants included:

- Children of diverse family origins: Catalonia, Spain, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.
- Newcomers to the country (in the last three years).
- Ethnic Roma people.
- People in a vulnerable family situation.
- People in a hospital setting.
- People with functional diversity.

Connections were made with them through municipal facilities. In order to achieve the greatest possible degree of diversity in terms of districts – as this ensures a more overall view of loneliness in the city – these activities involved **CRAEs (Educational Action Residential Centres) and some specific schools and/or groups, such as hospitalised children, as well as municipal facilities.**

The groups were organised according to facility. In other words, mixed groups of children from each facility's area of influence. For this reason, we took into account recommendations from the facilities, as they know their users best and could suggest the best ways of organising the planned sessions in order to achieve the highest possible degree of diversity.

METHODOLOGY

A PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY

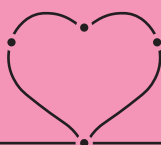
The participatory methodology views participants as active agents in a process of co-creation, rather than passive agents or simply recipients. The children themselves – and their families – contribute their reality to the project and fill it with content. Through everyday experiences, a new awareness of what loneliness means, and encouragement of dialogue and interaction with other participants, the idea was to create a space of collective intelligence that highlighted the importance of the view of loneliness as something that must be tackled in our society.

A PLAYFUL METHODOLOGY

Playful methodologies are a much-favoured resource in participatory methodologies. When people enter a game dynamic, they find themselves in a very particular psychological position, where ideas flow, relationships and connections multiply, and they feel free to express themselves and let their creativity reign.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that these sessions were aimed at children and families, and therefore people of different ages. Play – or enjoyment of play – promotes meaningful experiences and strengthens ties, without the intergenerational perspective being lost.

Though we considered the possibility of **virtual and in-person sessions**, the latter were the most effective, as they could reach people without easy access to technology and because participation through play in the depth we required made it necessary to share a space, eye contact and the energy created during the sessions.



CREATION OF THE TECHNICAL OFFICE

Constant monitoring throughout the proposal is essential, so that it can be considered a continuity project in which lessons are always being learned and turned into a useful, lasting resource. This is why the Technical Office played a key role. Its responsibilities include:

- Monitoring the implementation strategy.
- Coordinating the execution of the planned sessions through the corresponding centres.
- Creating the conditions for the actions carried out to be disseminated properly.
- Tracking and recording participation in the project, in order to facilitate quantitative evaluation of participation.
- Designing the strategies and resources needed to find out the participants' evaluation, in order to offer a qualitative evaluation.
- Planning the timings of the project in order to facilitate participation, considering schedule particularities and ensuring a development sequence that is coherent with the project.

SELECTION OF FACILITIES AND SENDING OF COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

Initially, the facilities in the district of Horta-Guinardó were chosen, given the diversity found in its neighbourhoods and the consequent representation of very different realities. This was later opened up to other districts, such as Ciutat Vella, Sant Martí, Nou Barris and Sarrià.

In order to maximise the facilities' involvement, they were presented with the proposal:

1. Through an email that outlined a few general ideas behind the project.
2. Through a phone call, so that anything they needed to know could be explained out loud.
3. Through a virtual meeting, in which the objective and methodologies of the activity sessions were explained more in detail.

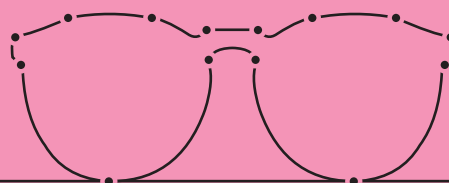
They were also informed of the results obtained and the next steps to be taken, by way of thanks for their collaboration.

In order to make this overview more comprehensive,

CRAEs (Educational Action Residential Centres) were also involved, as well as **schools** (Virolai) and other groups, such as hospitalised children (Hospital Sant Joan de Déu).

As mentioned, all the educators at the facilities were provided with information on the project and prior virtual training, so that they could help to find participants and organise the sessions. They were also invited to the activity session so that they could enjoy it and continue to act as a liaison and point of reference for the children and, if applicable, their families.

Furthermore, the facility, CRAE, school or group was responsible for managing elements relating to data protection, such as the documents to fill in and sign, and relating to evaluation of the session.



ACTIVITY SESSIONS

We set a goal to complete ten playful activity sessions with eight children per session: a total of 80 children, in other words.

These sessions included games and activities that aimed to raise awareness of loneliness, as well as what it means and how it affects us, both individually and collectively.

Each session was made up of different parts:

Session introduction: We introduced the participants to the theme and aims of the session, generating anticipation within a climate of trust that encouraged participation. They were also informed of what would happen with everything that came out of the session.

Ice breaker 1: through various activities, depending on the group, we started to broaden their perspective by playing with pictures and asking questions that encouraged them to use metaphors based on a visual element. Questions about what they liked and disliked, or what joy or loneliness meant to them. This created a climate of trust and togetherness in the group, while generating an atmosphere of spontaneity and inhibition.

The cards used were the Sikkhona Edu ones.

Game/activity to delve deeper into the subject of loneliness: through an adapted version of the game IKON- IKUS, we embarked on an activity to find out how the children feel in certain situations.

Each person had three cards. During their turn, they started off by saying "How would I feel if..." and described a situation. The others had to look at their three cards and put down the one that best matched how they would feel in that situation face down. The person whose turn it was then turned over the cards and chose the image that best fitted how they would feel. The person who put that card down won a point. The first participant to get to three points was the winner.

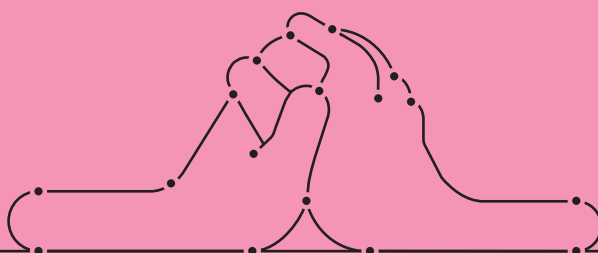
Within this activity, and after a first warm-up round, we introduced questions such as the following:

- How would I feel if I had no friends?
- How would I feel if the person I think is my best friend said they had no friends?
- How would I feel if someone I loved told me they felt lonely once?
- How would I feel if I could speak to everyone in the city where I live in their own language?
- How would I feel if I could go and play every day after school as long as I made new friends?
- How would I feel if I could talk to animals?
- (...)

At a certain point in the game, we invited the participants to think of new questions along these lines. This way, we could see what interested and what worried them. The questions thought up by the children themselves included the following:

- How would I feel if I could stay at school on Fridays?
- How would I feel if someone in my family died?
- How would I feel if no one came to pick me up at school?
- How would I feel if no one wanted to play with me in the playground?

Creative activity: the participants were asked to create an object to express what loneliness meant to them, based on the previous activity and what they had talked about. The result was a set of objects like drawings, sculptures, pieces of writing, a couple of collages and even creations with nearby objects.



DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

This project and the proposed methodology have enabled us to gather information on different levels, which must be assessed and evaluated, so that it can become the tool or resources we intended it to be, as well as the enriching, participatory process we envisaged.

In order to achieve this qualitative assessment of the proposal – carried out by the facilitators' direct

observation – the children were told to create a product (a drawing, video, collage, etc.), which became tangible elements we could use to evaluate participation and the values and reflections inherent in this collective activity.

FACILITIES CONTACTED

Below is a list of all the facilities we contacted. We contacted each centre's management directly, in some cases after talking to the District's technical professionals and educators.

We organised information meetings to explain the project to them and, in most cases, a meeting with educators to provide more in-depth information on the session.

CENTRE	DISTRICT	DATE (2021)	PEOPLE	AGES
Virolai School	Horta-Guinardó	29/01	10 children***	12–13 years
Kids Barcelona	Hospital Sant Joan de Déu	05/02	9 teenagers	16–22 years
Special education school Mare de Déu de Montserrat	Horta-Guinardó	08/02	9 teenagers 8 teenagers	12–14 years
CRAE* Maria Reina	Sarrià-Sant Gervasi	10/02	6 children	10–12 years
C. I.** Ciutat Meridiana	Nou Barris	09/03	6 children 6 children	10–12 years
C. I. Vallbona	Nou Barris	18/03	5 children	6–10 years
C. I. Canyelles	Nou Barris	Drawings handed in	2 children	
C. I. Guinardó	Horta-Guinardó	09/04	3 teenagers	13–14 years
C. I. Teixonera	Horta-Guinardó	16/04	4 children 4 children	12–15 years
C. I. Drassanes	Ciutat Vella	23/04	9 teenagers 6 children	12–14 years 10–12 years

* Educational Action Residential Centre

** Casal Infantil (children's activity centre)

TOTAL CHILDREN 87

***The Virolai School got the whole class involved in the project, recreating the session. So, 15 more children can be added indirectly.

VIROLAI SCHOOL

Day and time: 28/01/2021 - 2.45 pm

Format: Virtual

Children participating: 10 pupils + 25 children in the classroom with the teacher

Ages: 12-13

Educator: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

Joy and sadness in pictures. Many of the pictures of **joy** are of **people and/or animals**. Meanwhile, the "sad" pictures tend to be more abstract, like a stormy sea or a cave with some reflected light.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

The children see loneliness in a **physical way**: they can feel lonely because there is no one around them, or because someone has died or because they are on a desert island.

They showed signs of **resilience**: for example, in the case of losing friendships, they saw an opportunity for making new ones.

They also thought about space for reflection: when you feel lonely, you can make the most of this time to **stop and think**.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They all **know someone who feels lonely**. They can tell someone is feeling lonely because of their appearance, their face or their expression.

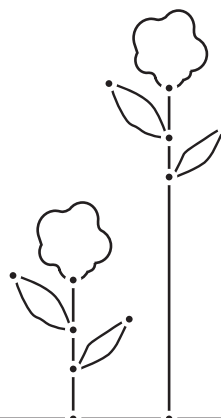
Asking them questions, keeping them company and doing things together are ways of helping them to feel less lonely.
Other approaches

Artistic production

We decided that they had a mission to represent what loneliness meant to them in an artistic creation. The things they produced are with the teacher who accompanied us during the activity.

Comments

The teacher suggested carrying on this work with other school years (both the game and the drawing activity). She has gathered 25 drawings on loneliness from her class and notes she wrote on the game.



KIDS BARCELONA HOSPITAL SANT JOAN DE DÉU

Day and time: 05/02/2021 - 5 pm

Format: Virtual

Children participating: 9 teenagers & young people who have been hospitalised, are currently hospitalised or have experienced a loved one (a child or young person) being hospitalised.

Ages: 16-22

Person in charge: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

The activity is to choose a picture that represents **loneliness** and another that evokes **calm**.

Most of the pictures chosen for **loneliness** are images of **people and their shadows** (people begging, reflections of children...). For the word **calm**, they choose pictures of **scenery** or **smiles**.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They talk about solitude (being alone) and **loneliness (feeling alone, even if you are not)**. They also point out the difference between being alone and **learning to be alone**.

They detect loneliness when they feel **drowsy, downcast**, etc. Nothing specific has to happen; just a comment from someone can make you feel like this. Or something you say to yourself. You can feel angry.

Sometimes, **they do not allow themselves to be sad or feel bad because they are lonely**. As though they have no right to, with everything going on around them.

They suggest that a way of getting out of this situation **is by thinking and realising you are not alone** or calling a friend. Someone can manage things in one way or another way, depending on the tools they have. A lot is said about support from others and, **above all, professionals**.

Things that should never be said:

- a. We all feel lonely sometimes.
- b. Get out there and do something about it.
- c. Don't worry about it, it's normal.
- d. Any motivational quote by Mr. Wonderful or Paulo Coelho...

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They detect loneliness in others in the same way they detect it in themselves: through this **"sad", downcast energy**.

They provide help in the following ways:

- a. A friend would help you to get things off your chest. Without judging.
- b. I would ask what they want to do. And respect what they want.
- c. Let them talk and then help to build a solution. Sometimes that's what people need.
- d. Look for activities to do alone, to spend time on yourself and have some space.

How the city can help people who feel lonely

Make sure that everyone has **professional psychological support**. Friends and family do not always know what to do, so access to a professional is important.

Other approaches

Being alone can teach you things in life.

Artistic production

Given the young people's age, they were not offered this activity.

MARE DE DÉU DE MONTSERRAT SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL GRUP 1

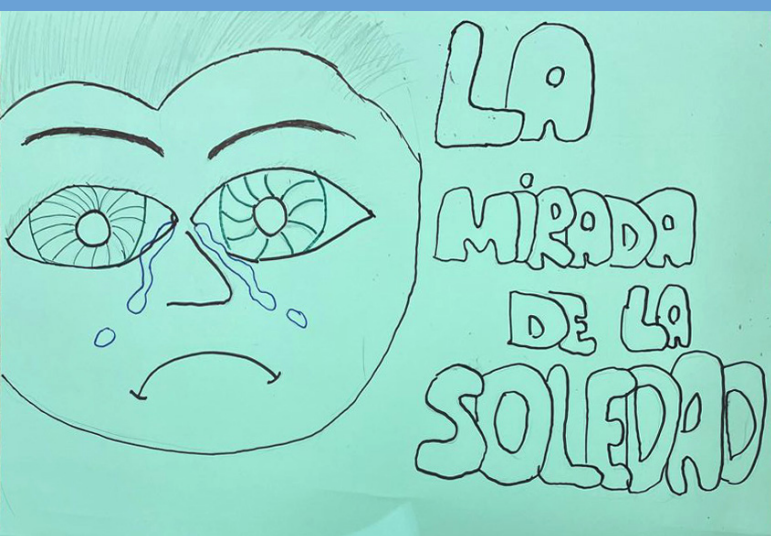
Day and time: 08/02/2021 - 3 pm

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 9

Ages: 12-14

Educator: 2



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

Joy and calm. Joy linked to people and smiles. Calm with scenery, the sea, etc.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They associate loneliness with **feeling alone even when you are surrounded by people.**

They see physical solitude as **positive**; it generates responsibility and satisfaction in them.

They detect loneliness when **they do not feel at ease in a place or with themselves.**

To remedy the situation, they **meet with friends** and remember that they are not alone.

An example of when they feel lonely is when **they get left on read on social media.**

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They see loneliness in others through **the look in their eyes.** They see that they can help them by keeping them company, making them laugh, etc.

Artistic production

They have kept them in case they are asked for.

In this case, the children have done three drawings:

- A WhatsApp conversation where the other person has left them on read.
- The look they see in a lonely person's eyes.
- A house isolated from everyone else.

MARE DE DÉU DE MONTSERRAT SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL GRUP 2

Day and time: 08/02/2021 - 3 pm

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 8

Ages: 12-14

Educator: 4



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

Given the characteristics of the group, we went straight to the game. Before that, we talked about things we like a lot: chocolate, playing, drawing, video games, animals, etc.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

You feel lonely because you feel sad and, above all, **misunderstood and/or ignored.**

You experience loneliness when there are other people with you and they are talking but **you do not understand them or they do nothing to involve you in the conversation.**

They can **feel lonely at school, at home, or with their family.** It is especially hurtful in the playground, when other pupils **do not want to play with them** or they leave them out.

In theory, **solitude is not problematic** for them. They feel surrounded by family and friends.

Sometimes, **they want to be alone!** And they feel good!

When they feel lonely, they feel better when they **think about other things, play, do things they like, or talk to friends.**

Animals are also great at helping people feel less lonely.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They detect loneliness in others through their **body language:** their face, the shape of their mouth, their posture.

When they can see that someone is lonely, they try to **suggest activities to them:** doing things together, inviting them to their home, playing, travelling, talking...

In other words, their **antidotes to loneliness** are related to sharing time, energy and activities with others. **Loneliness can be tackled.**

Artistic production

We can see mainly sad faces, but also a couple of happy drawings, because being alone does not always equate to being sad. Loneliness surrounded by people and circumstantial loneliness, due to a specific situation.

The drawings have been kept at the school.

CRAE MARIA REINA

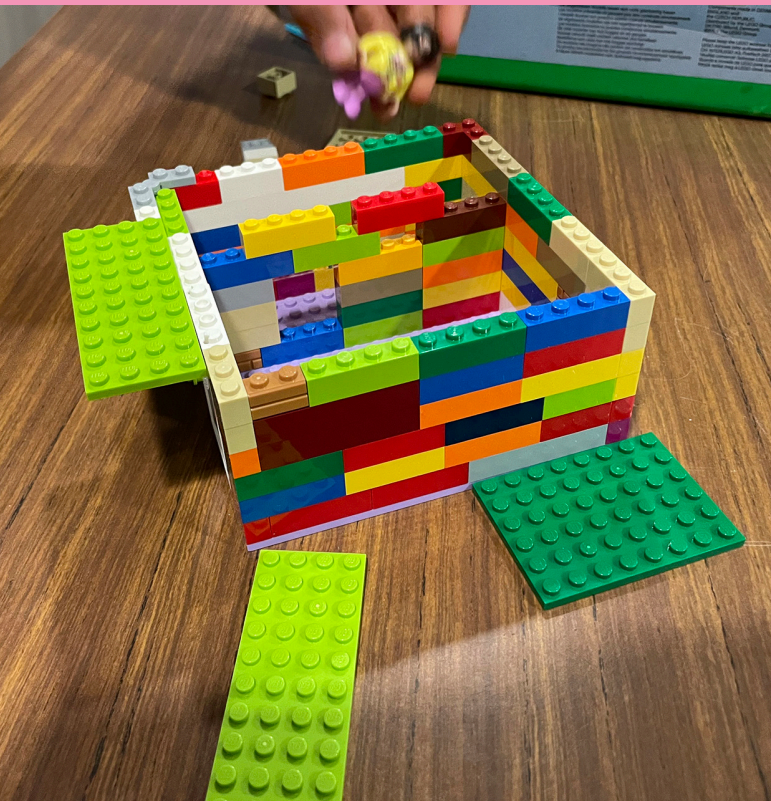
Day and time: 10/02/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 6

Ages: 10-12

Educator: 1



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used pictures to ask them about **things that they like**, and the ideas that emerged included food, sport, animals, dancing, playing, music, boxing, and more. When asked for **something that is important to them**, the answers included family, friendship, joy, food and music.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

Loneliness due to **discrimination for being different**, for having a different skin colour.

The **contradiction in the mind wanting to be alone and the body wanting to go and play** and be with other people.

Feeling lonely **on the playground, surrounded by people**.
Feeling lonely while they are with others.

They see **loneliness as a state of mind**.

They detect loneliness

- rather than solitude, which they sometimes like and seek
- because they are **sad and downcast, because of their body language, their lack of joy, their lack of any desire to do anything...**

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They are **very empathic when they think someone is lonely**. They ask them questions, they talk to them, they try to cheer them up and make them feel important, they play with them, they take them somewhere else, etc.

At the same time, they believe that **giving people space** is important, because sometimes they need it.

They do not like it when people **fail to appreciate their feelings** and tell them that it does not matter, or that it will pass, or that this happens to everyone.

Artistic production

The children produced drawings and constructions made from Lego. As for the drawings, there is one that shows how loneliness can make you "like the **Joker**" and another with a **house** with people coming and going. The constructions, meanwhile, included a **very deep well**, from which it is hard to get out, but not impossible; a **robot** – who ends up having a robot friend and a house – and a **luxury car** in which everyone can fit, because otherwise, it would feel lonely.

CI MERIDIANA

GRUP 1

Day and time: 9/03/2021 - 4.30–5.30 pm

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 6

Ages: 8-10

Characteristics of the children:

Years 4 and 5 (8–10 years). Most of the participants were born in Barcelona to Maghrebi and Latin American families.

The year 4 and 5 group is split into two groups of 6, due to Covid-19 restrictions, and each group contains children from both years. It is a lively, active group with a wide range of interests, and this is reflected in the questions they ask. This year has been very intense for them: the pandemic and its consequences have affected their families and worsened their financial and social situation, coverage of their basic needs, etc. This has repercussions on the children, who have had a year full of upheaval, conflicts, and emotions that they have struggled to identify and manage. At this time, the activity centre has become a relaxed space for enjoyment, support, care, listening and company on both an individual and a group basis.

Educator: 1



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

We used the pictures to ask them for “**something that was important to them**”, and they came up with concepts like family, friends, joy, animals, climate change, the sea... When they were asked for “**something that represents loneliness**”, they chose pictures of a person on their own, an animal helping another, a picture of calm and tranquillity, etc.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They detect loneliness in themselves in **specific situations**: when they are alone, when everyone else is sleeping or when no one wants to play with them. They differentiate between a **state of solitude and a state of discomfort**.

They recognise that you can feel lonely when you are surrounded by people. They have felt that way themselves. **They do not know why** sometimes they like being alone and sometimes they do not. They do not like it when they are alone because no one wants to play with them or when they are left alone at home. To feel better, they do things they like doing, such as playing or painting.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They recognise loneliness in others in **their face, because they are not playing, or because they are crying**.

To help them, they might ask if they want to play or be their friend. They can defend them if they are getting bullied. They feel sorry that **poor people feel doubly lonely**.

Other approaches

They explored questions like “what if a family member died”, “what if a friend died”, “what if someone had to go into hospital”.

In **a city that combats loneliness** there would be games, plenty of people and peace, and there would be no bad, racist or sexist people.

Loneliness is like a wall that separates us from other people.

CI MERIDIANA

GRUP 2

Day and time: 9/03/2021 - 5.30 – 6.30 pm

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 6

Ages: 8-10

Educator: 1



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

We used the pictures to ask the children for “**something that was important to them**”, and they came up with ideas like joy, friendship, peace, calm, helping others... When they were asked for “**something that represents loneliness**”, they chose pictures of people on their own. When you are alone, “the sun breaks”.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They recognise loneliness in **specific situations**, such as “when someone steals an idea from you”, when they get locked in the bathroom, or when they give their all for someone and they leave. They do not like loneliness. And they feel sorry that people feel lonely at school. Loneliness scares them. It seems unpleasant to them. They show signs of distress.

They combat loneliness by playing, looking for new friends, doing things they like. Playing on their own for a bit is fine, but it is better with others. Even with imaginary friends.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They recognise loneliness in others in **their face, because they are not playing, or in their movements**.

They ask them: “do you want to be my friend?”, “do you want to play?”, “do you want to come over to my house?”, “do you want some company?”, etc.

Other approaches

In a **city that combats loneliness**, there are fun games, plenty of people to keep you company, happiness, friendship, energy and animals.

Comments

They would like a city with games, peace, a lot of people, and no one who is bad, racist or sexist.

CI VALLBONA

Day and time: 18/03/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 5

Ages: 7-8

Characteristics of the activity centre:

There is a stable number of participants at the activity centre: 24 children aged between 4 and 10.

Gender: 7 boys and 17 girls

Family origin: 5 from Catalonia/Spain (5 of which are from the Roma community), 13 from Latin America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Honduras, Nicaragua), 5 from North Africa (Morocco and Algeria) and 2 from Pakistan.

Educator: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used pictures to ask them about things that **they liked doing**, and the ideas that emerged included parties with friends, activities with the family and connecting with nature.

We also asked **what they did not like**, and the children came up with concepts relating to darkness and fear.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:

how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They detect loneliness in themselves when **they feel sad**, and when they cannot do the **things they like doing** with the people they love.

To feel better, they know then can **ask for help** from an adult or from someone else at school.

They do not like feeling lonely, being **insulted**, being **hurt** or being **pressured** to do things they do not want to do.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:

is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They know when someone is sad because of their **hunched-over posture**. When they see this, they know that they have to go and ask if they want to play and try to cheer them up.

Artistic production

The pictures they created symbolise loneliness in a physical way: being home alone, celebrating your birthday alone or having no one around you.

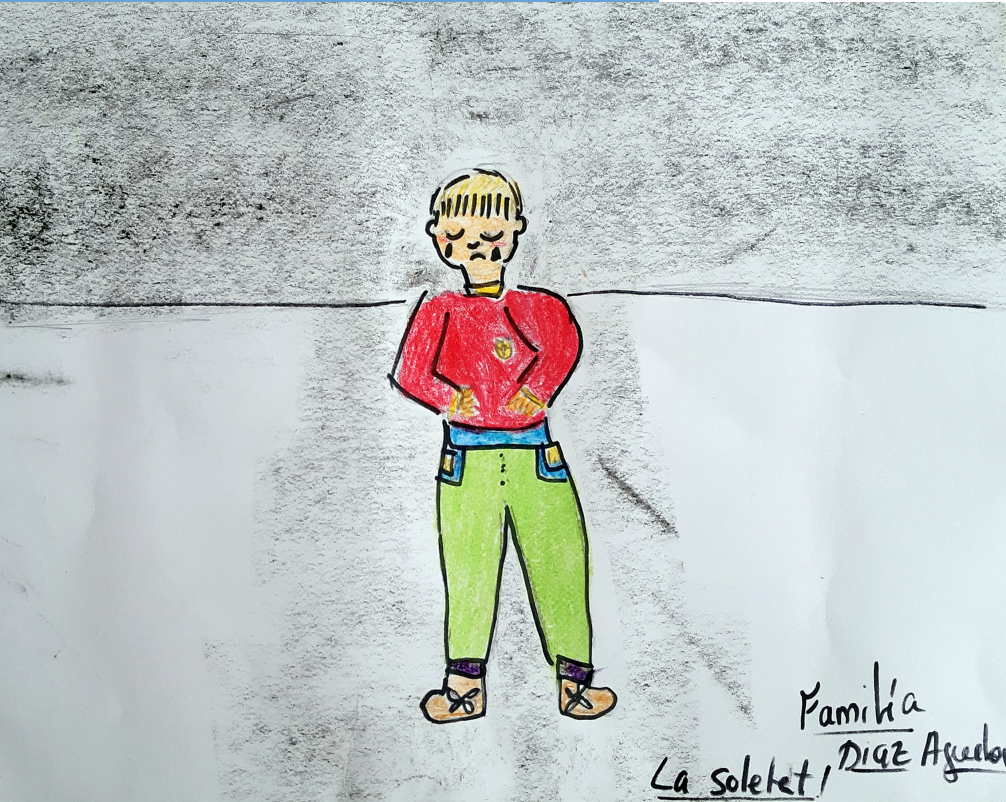
Comments

They would like a city with games, peace, a lot of people, and no one who is bad, racist or sexist.



CI CANYELLES

Two drawings done by families and children to express their view of loneliness are handed in.



CI GUINARDÓ

Day and time: 09/04/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 3

Ages: 13-14

Characteristics of the activity centre:

LITTLE ONES

Group total: 12 children

Ages: between 4 and 7

Gender: 7 boys and 5 girls

Ethnicities: 1 boy born in Bolivia, 1 girl with family from Honduras, 1 boy with family from Romania and 1 boy with family from Peru.

OLDER CHILDREN

Group total: 12 children

Ages: between 8 and 11

Gender: 7 boys and 5 girls

Ethnicities: 1 boy born in Chile with family from Peru, 1 girl born in Brazil, 1 girl with family from Peru, 1 boy with family from Bolivia and 1 girl with family from Paraguay.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Group total: 10 young people

Ages: between 12 and 16

Gender: 4 girls and 6 boys

Ethnicities: 1 boy born in Nicaragua, 1 boy born in Honduras, 1 boy with family from Peru and 1 boy with family from Argentina.

Educator: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used the pictures to ask for things that **inspire feelings of calm** and others that **generate loneliness**. For the calm feelings, they chose pictures relating to **scenery** that evoke infinity. Meanwhile, the pictures that stirred up feelings of loneliness were the ones **relating to people who are physically alone** or living in an unstable situation.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself: how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They recognise loneliness in themselves when **they feel misunderstood**. To feel better, they know that they have to **ask for help**, and they do not like people asking them how they are feeling.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others: is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They recognise loneliness in others when someone is alone or feels **misunderstood** by everyone around them. They can detect loneliness when they see someone physically alone.

A good idea would be to **help the person** to feel less lonely, but they insist that this person must **want to be helped**.

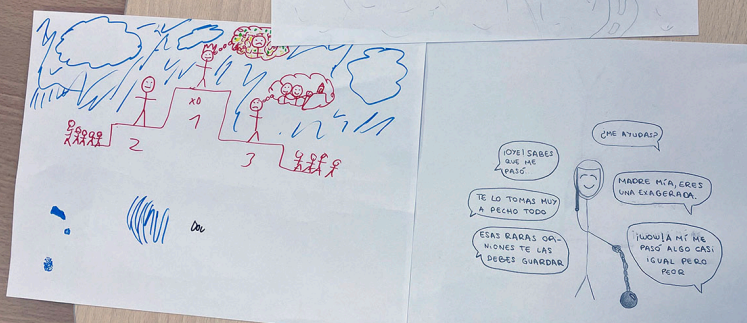
Other approaches

Solitude is not always negative: you can be **home alone**, for example, which they deem a **positive, motivating** kind of solitude.

Meanwhile, they think the **triggers of loneliness** can be losing money, not buying what you want or losing a friend because they do not know you well.

Artistic production

The pictures they have created show what we talked about previously: being a winner but misunderstood (having no friends), physical solitude, and loneliness seen through external comments.



CI TEIXONERA

GRUP 1

Day and time: 16/04/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 4

Ages: 12-15

Characteristics of the children:

There are currently 9 children signed up, 4 of which are in year 7, 3 in year 9, and 2 in year 10. There are 6 boys and 3 girls. This is a group with a lot of cultural diversity and very different origins.

Although some of them were born here, their families are from Morocco, Pakistan, Uruguay, Bolivia and Ukraine.

Educator: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used the pictures to ask for things that **inspire feelings of joy** and others that **generate loneliness**. For joy, they chose pictures relating to **nature, parties, smiles and calm**.

The pictures that generated feelings of loneliness, on the other hand, were the ones they connected to **bullying or freedom**.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:

how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

They detect loneliness in themselves because they have experienced or still experience **bullying**. They feel lonely when people give them dirty looks, make comments on what they say or simply ignore them. One **solution is music**: this is how they deal with loneliness. Alternatively, they think they could make friends with "popular" people to **make others jealous** and feel less alone.

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:

is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They recognise loneliness in others when **people laugh at them, bother them** or even hit them.

In these situations, they can **approach** the person and **defend them**. They also pointed out that laughing or ignoring the situation does not work.

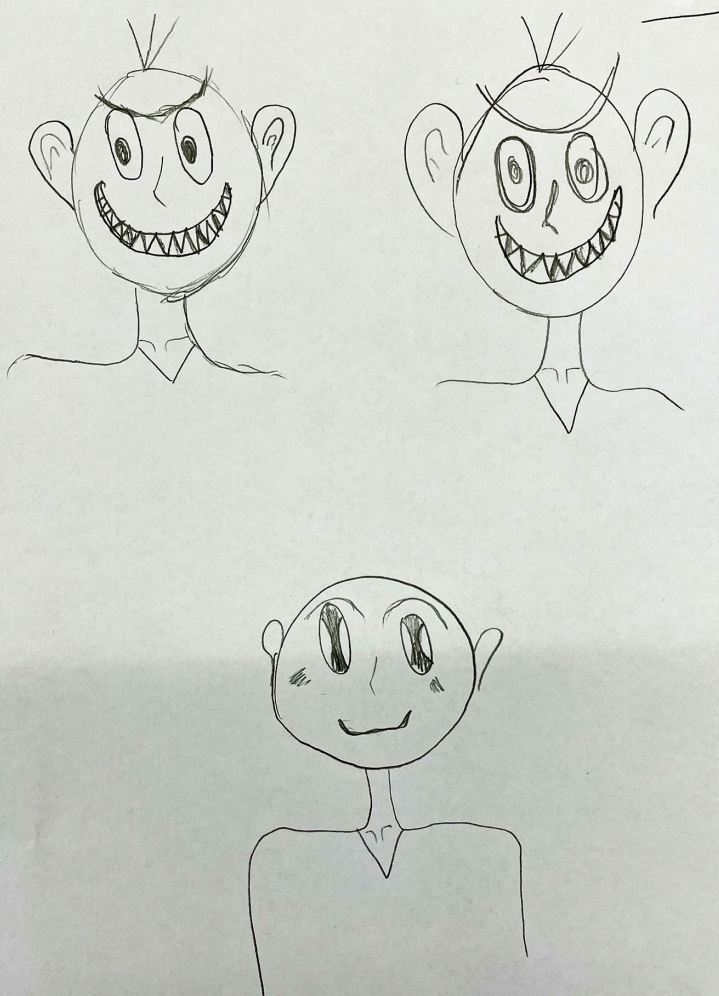
Other approaches

Loneliness as **bullying**, but also solitude as **liberation** from the social pressure caused by the family and people around them.

Tools for tackling loneliness: animals and contact with nature.

Artistic production

Loneliness as darkness, but with the idea that there are always **new paths to take**, new stars to explore. Solitude as a **neutral state**: it can make you happy or distressed. Loneliness as an internal state, experienced by all kinds of people. People who should feel lonely for health reasons, but perhaps do not.



CI TEIXONERA

GRUP 2

Day and time: 16/04/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 4

Ages: 10-12

Educator: 1

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used the pictures to ask for things that **were important** to them and others that **generate loneliness**. Representing joy, they chose pictures relating to **family, friends, teamwork, older people, animals, climate change, helping others, building with others, etc.**

Meanwhile, the pictures they linked to loneliness showed physical solitude or people whose posture made them think they were lonely.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

Solitude **can be a desired, brilliant thing**. They realise they are lonely because they feel sad and disorientated. Lost.

They ask for help from friends and adults. They try to **make sure they are not being "annoying"**. They seek support from **people who help them "without you having to say anything, because they just know"**.

They think about something else. "Even though I'm alone, I'll think about someone".

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They realise someone is lonely because of their posture, and they help them by playing with them, having fun with them, going out in the street with them.

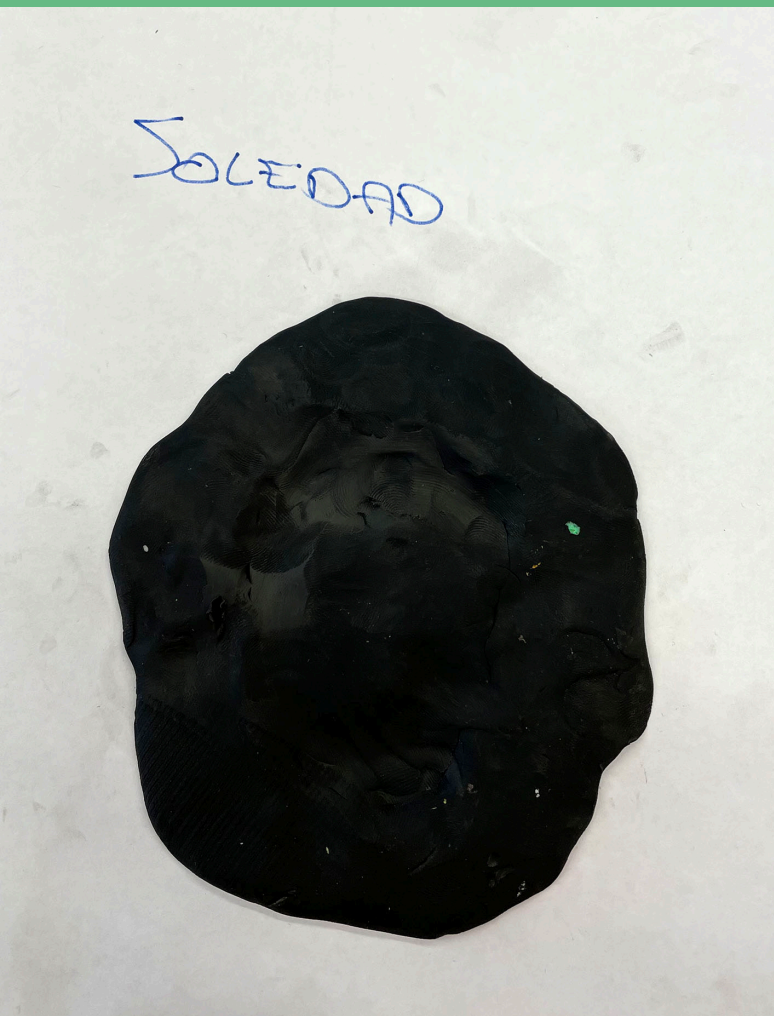
They think that poverty is a cause of loneliness and that we should interact with others more freely.

Even so, they think that anyone can feel lonely: even rich people and YouTubers.

Other approaches

The **activity centre is the safest place**. More than school. They wonder why things cannot be done this way at school. They want to be happy and, above all, at peace.

At school, they learn to solve problems "by themselves": "you can't trust teachers", "they don't do anything".



CI DRASSANES

GRUP 1

Day and time: 23/04/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 9
(including 2 children with special needs)

Ages: 7-12

Characteristics of the children:

Most of the children were born in Spain, to families from the following places: Bangladesh, Spain, Honduras, Ecuador, Gambia, India, Morocco and Pakistan.

Educator: 2



PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used the pictures to ask the children to identify **"something important to them"**, and they came up with family, friendship, animals and the planet. When asked **"What is loneliness?"**, they chose pictures of poverty (someone begging) and people on their own, either in action or still with a sad expression.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

Solitude **can be joyful** when it is sought out. When it is not wanted, they feel sad and try to **ask for help from adults**.

They are afraid of being called dramatic, or being laughed at or even insulted. They cannot stand being scorned when they feel like this (and responses like "don't be a crybaby").

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They notice that someone might be lonely when they look or seem sad. They openly ask them **what is wrong**, and offer to play with them, keep them company or hug them.

But they give them space if that is what the person wants.

Other approaches

They agree that **"you don't have to be happy every day"**. School is a much appreciated safe space. That never turns its back on them.

CI DRASSANES

GRUP 2

Day and time: 23/04/2021

Format: Face to face

Children participating: 6

Ages: 9-11

Educator: 2

PICTURES TO OPEN YOUR MIND

In this session, we used the pictures to ask the children to identify "**something important to them**", and they came up with family, friendship, joy, etc. In response to the question "**What is loneliness?**", pictures of sadness were chosen.

Aspects relating to loneliness and yourself:
how do you recognise loneliness in yourself? What do you do to feel better? What don't you like about it?

Loneliness **is a sad mood**. You can feel lonely when you are with people. They are scared of it. They feel angry. To feel less lonely, they think about something else, they play, or they distract themselves in some other way. They ask to be cared for and cuddled.

They do not like being told off, being punished or having their feelings hurt because they have said they feel lonely. They hate it when people say "get over it".

Aspects relating to loneliness and others:
is there someone close to you who you think feels lonely? How do you know they feel lonely? How would you approach this person? How could you help them?

They can recognise someone who is lonely because they are alone, not playing with anyone, in a corner. And by their face.

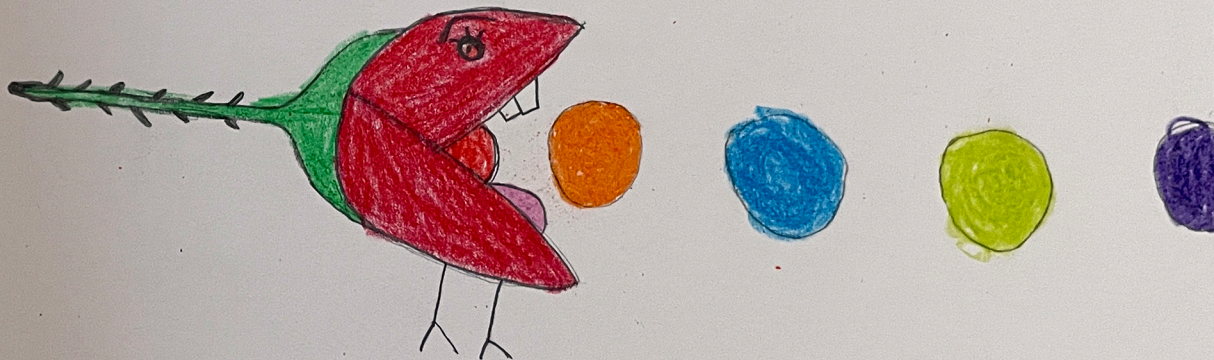
They invite them to play their favourite games, to come over to their house, to a party, to go and see a film, **to find something they like**.

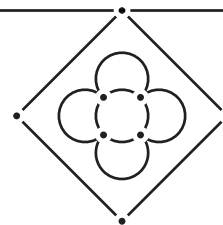
Other approaches

They can feel **lonely at home, at school or at the park**. Loneliness is scary: "**I'm no one**".

Comments

They wanted to play again when the session was over.





TABLES OF POINTS IN COMMON AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT SESSIONS

PUNTS ESPECÍFICS DELS DIFERENTS COLLECTIUS

Virolai	Physical solitude holds as much weight as emotional loneliness. Thinking and reflecting on the situation to feel less lonely.
Mare de Déu de Montserrat	Physical solitude as something positive. Being left alone is an achievement.
CRAE* Maria Reina	Though all groups share the idea of “feeling lonely even though you are with people”, this group really highlights the contradiction between physical solitude and emotional loneliness : I want to be alone but my body does not.
Kids Barcelona - HsjdD	Search for professional support . This group, whose participants are older, suggests more relaxed company or conversation to feel less lonely or help someone to feel less lonely, rather than the activities proposed by the younger participants. Furthermore, when detecting loneliness in others, they are more aware of the person's mood and not just their body language.
C. I.** Meridiana	Loneliness is when no one wants to play with you . Distress at the idea of loneliness.
C. I. Vallbona	Solitude as a calm space without pressure from adults.
C. I. Guinardó	Solitude as a responsibility and loneliness as an internal feeling : you can win and not have anyone to celebrate with.
C. I. Teixonera	Loneliness through and as bullying . Concern about being annoying with their problems, thus generating even more rejection. Getting help without having to ask for it .
C. I. Drassanes	The loneliness caused by being different and, above all, in safe spaces , like home (staying with someone you do not want to be with is like being alone) or the playground.

* Educational Action Residential Centre

** Casal Infantil (children's activity centre)

POINTS IN COMMON ACROSS THE DIFFERENT SESSIONS

	Recognising that someone is feeling lonely	Levels of resilience	Type of loneliness/solitude	Ways of feeling less lonely
Virolai	Facial expression, appearance.	Resilience to overcome loneliness, to find "the bright side" and walk new paths.	Physical solitude and emotional loneliness.	Talking, playing, sharing.
Mare de Déu de Montserrat	Facial expression: smiling or sad.	Resilience in seeing solitude as responsibility and trust in them to let them be alone .	Emotional loneliness (feeling lonely even though you are not alone).	Doing things, playing, meeting with friends, travelling.
CRAE* Maria Reina	Facial expression, posture, whether or not they are quiet.	Everyone's capacity to overcome loneliness. "You can feel lonely whether you are rich or poor".	Emotional loneliness.	Playing, dancing, doing sport with others.
Kids Barcelona HsJdD	Appearance, mood.	Resilience to act based on reflections on what is happening to me.	Physical solitude, emotional loneliness and learning to be alone.	Keeping someone company, talking, supporting them.
C. I.** Meridiana	Asking them. Facial expression. Crying.	Resilience in looking for new friends who appreciate you.	Physical solitude and emotional loneliness.	Playing, looking for friends, going to someone's house, asking.
C. I. Vallbona	Posture.	Resilience in seeing and feeling loneliness. Solitude as a free space without pressure from adults.	Physical solitude: being alone.	Asking if they want to play, cheering them up.
C. I. Guinardó	Posture.	Resilience in seeing that solitude has positive aspects, like the responsibility of being alone.	Physical solitude and emotional loneliness.	Their own will. To stop feeling lonely, you have to want to.
C. I. Teixonera	Because people are laughing at them. Because they are alone and sad.	Resilience to overcome loneliness and seek new paths . Getting closer to people who understand your problems.	Loneliness as bullying.	Music and nature as company. Thinking about someone else. Feeling accompanied.
C. I. Drassanes	Attitude, emotions, face, energy.	Resilience in realising that you do not have to be happy every day .	Physical solitude and emotional loneliness (feeling that "I'm no one").	Caring, cuddling, hugging, playing, laughing, asking for help.

* Educational Action Residential Centre

** Casal Infantil (children's activity centre)

(All the groups agree that loneliness is a temporary state)

LONELINESS THROUGH THE EYES OF CHILDREN, TEENAGERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

From this process we initiated in order to understand what loneliness means for children and, above all, to combat it, we have drawn various conclusions to be shared.

- In children aged up to 12–14 years, loneliness is not yet linked to prejudice or the idea of being a burden. It is circumstantial. Being alone is something fleeting. We could even deduce that the word “loneliness” is not scary like it is in the adult world. This leads us to think that it might be a good idea to act **before it is too late**, because as the groups get older, they gain more awareness and they require more in-depth resources.
- Though almost all the children indicated that they have felt lonely at some point, the groups start to be aware that this **could be a problem from the age of 8–10** years. This could be a good age at which to aim preventive action, as they understand the concept and are starting to feel its counter-productive effects.
- At the same time, the children are very aware that **intentional solitude is necessary**, that they need to be alone sometimes and that it **helps them to be independent**. When solitude is intentional, it is received with joy and a feeling of trust. This concept, which they arrived at on their own, should be strengthened.
- Except for the older group (which asked for professional help and resources), the rest of the children try to get rid of the feelings of sadness or anger stirred up by loneliness (in many cases, they see it as unfair) **by talking to people who will listen to them, playing, going out, making new friends**, etc. And they are perfectly capable of recognising loneliness in others and trying to help them to overcome it in different ways (probably in the ways they would like to be helped).
- **In the city, they call for professional resources**, such as experts, facilities and the abolition of poverty, sexism and racism, which they believe make people feel lonely. Meanwhile, they are sceptical regarding what adults can do to help them **in the situation in which they have felt lonely, mainly in the playground or at home**. Intimate spaces that are difficult for a public authority to access, unless **some type of tool or resource is introduced to schools or the family environment**, such as a game, that both signposts to resources and **makes adults more aware** of the messages they put across and how their behaviour can have an effect in the situations of loneliness shown by children.
- There are many **points in common in the way the participants experience loneliness, despite the children's differences**. From the Escola Virolai to a CRAE, via children's activity centres and hospital settings, all children agreed that the challenge lies in **understanding** why (or for what purpose) they feel lonely – whether they are physically alone or accompanied – and how to deal with the emotions this stirs up. Another challenge is **how to overcome it** (assuming they can) when these emotions are unpleasant and **how to help someone** who is feeling lonely.

