

Press release for St Valentine's Day

'We will be your Valentine

From friendly hearts in SeniorLine'

It's not true that youth is wasted on the young. The young and the not so young deserve their days of romance, when one and one become two, often leading to happy ever after.

However, how long does 'ever after' last? Many older people, no longer part of a couple, may feel very lonely at this time of year. Everywhere they turn, the emphasis is on cosy togetherness. With love in the air, solitary older people can feel particularly alone. Many callers contact SeniorLine over the St Valentine's season because they are missing a lifetime partner. Other callers who have experienced divorce, break-up or separation may be full of regrets, while single callers who never married may look back on a life of unfulfilled promise.

SeniorLine, Ireland's only peer telephone service for older people, receives almost one thousand calls a month from older people throughout Ireland. Callers feeling particularly lonely in the St Valentine's season often want to talk about the people no longer in their lives:

'My husband died of cancer three years ago, I am feeling desolate and feel the grief inside me all the time'. Elizabeth 67

'I don't have the courage to end it all, I would if I could' Michael, 72, recently widowed and childless

'My husband of 53 years is now in nursing home. I will visit him today, but it is very difficult on my own' Francis 64

'I am separated 34 years, and my son and daughter live abroad. It wasn't meant to be like this' John 72

'I never married, I moved back to Ireland after I retired, but it seems to be very hard to make friends' Gillian 63

Being surrounded by people buying cards and chocolates, and by endless articles on evenings for two, can be upsetting if you are spending St Valentine's Day alone. Studies now show that loneliness can increase the risk of high blood pressure and have a negative impact on cognitive decline, dementia and depression.

SeniorLine gives bereaved callers time to talk about the people they have lost, whether the loved one is gone two years or 22. Other callers may feel sad, angry, or resentful because of the way life has turned out. Talking things through can be useful, and sometimes there may be options that callers have not considered. It is often unhelpful, for example, to compare yourself to others. People who feel lonely can believe that everyone else's life is more idyllic, thus adding to feelings of isolation. This can lead to 'compare and despair'. Callers may be reminded that many others are alone as they are.

- Reach out. Don't be afraid to reach out for companionship or a chat. Other people may feel lonely too and be glad you made the first move
- Go at your own pace. If you are shy in new social situations, get out and about among other people where you may be part of the crowd. A smile and a friendly greeting can go a long way

- **Open up.** If you have acquaintances in your life, but few friends, opening up more may deepen your connections.
- **Lift the phone.** A chat with a friend or relative over the phone can be the next best thing to being with them.
- **Stay connected by email, text or through social media**

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