

Colour key:

**Yellow** = names and key words in text/question

**Blue** = part of text where answer can be found (usually synonyms)

**Green** = gap fill answers (actual words used, not synonyms)

**Yellow, blue & purple** = opinion match answers

**Read the article below and attempt the questions that follow.**

1. If you were lonely, would you go into a café and sit down for a chat with a complete stranger? That's the idea behind **Sainsbury's** new "talking tables" initiative. **The supermarket chain** has designated **specific tables** in its cafés as places where you can have a conversation with a stranger instead of sitting alone and feeling isolated. It comes as the UK government launches its first loneliness strategy to deal with the issue nationwide. But what's particularly revealing is to hear what those employed in the retail sector see of the loneliness of their customers.

**Questions 1 and 2: Tick (✓) the correct answer from the options listed below (refer to paragraphs 1 and 2).**

**Q 1. Sainsbury's "talking tables" initiative**

**A is only at certain tables.**

**B is part of the UK government strategy on loneliness.**

**C was started by café employees.**

**D is in all of its cafés.**

2. There are 20 Sainsbury's cafés, roughly ten per cent of this arm of the business, piloting the "talking tables" idea, including the branch in Fulham, West London. Edward Collet, who works on the welcome desk, sees people every day who he feels come to the supermarket for company as much as for shopping. He says some are bereaved husbands who relied on the social networking skills of their wives and are now trapped in solitary lives. They don't want to be perceived as lonely, Collet says, and might crave company, but don't feel able to ask for it.

**Q 2. Edward Collet describes seeing**

**A people more interested in socialising than shopping.**

**B husbands whose wives are helping them socialise.**

**C men who are shy about showing a need for friendship.**

**D people who don't realise how lonely they are.**

**Be careful!** The word 'husbands' is a key word and is mentioned in answer (B) but these are 'bereaved\* husbands who relied (past tense) on the social networking skills of their wives (now dead\*)'

**Questions 3–7: Complete each gap with NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the text**

**(refer to paragraphs 3–6).**

3. Checkout assistant Rupa Graham sees shoppers who will wait until they can be served by a particular assistant because they see them as friends, and this is a moment when they can swap a few words. It's their chance for some human interaction which they really appreciate.

**Q 3.** Some customers enjoy the human interaction/moment when they are being served by a shop assistant they know.

There are also young mothers, cut off from the adult company of work, who, Graham says, can seem quite harassed, which she puts down to their feelings of isolation. She feels she often sees those at risk of chronic isolation, where people lose all contact with the outside world and effectively live inside their houses.

**Q 4.** Rupa Graham believes that young mothers' isolation makes them seem quite harassed.

4. With so many public places closing, whether it's post offices, libraries, churches or pubs, the supermarket has become one of the last places people can still meet and feel safe, says store manager Leigh Brown. He feels much of what really happens in a shop on a day-to-day basis goes unrecognised by the customers who dive in and out.

**Q 5.** According to Leigh Brown, for some customers the daily activity in a supermarket goes unrecognised.

"Staff in the shop often work alongside local charities, churches and food banks, creating a kind of informal community support network," he says. "Last week an elderly man was noticed spending the entire day in the shop — and as it was eventually closing, I gave him a lift home." Brown is confident the talking tables will catch on with customers, because, he says, he's seen how in other places they attract their own cult following, with people integrating it into their social lives.

**Q 6. Brown thinks that “talking tables” will become part of people’s social lives.**

5. So if these Sainsbury’s employees were asked for their own first-hand answers for tackling loneliness, what would they suggest?

**Graham** believes the challenge lies in bridging the gap between generations in families so that young people can spend more time with elderly people. She also would like to have less negative media coverage of the danger of meeting strangers, because it creates a fear of talking to them.

6. **Brown** feels that the most pressing problem is that town centres are dying and the places where people might socialise are disappearing. “What are we going to do with them? We need local authorities to invest in town centres and re-invent them, creating new social spaces for people to interact, or we’re going to end up with ghost towns.”

**Q 7. Brown is afraid that without more possibilities for socialising, we will find ourselves living in ghost towns.**

**Beware!** Some paragraphs (like paragraph 6) contain a lot of answers!

**Q 8. Match each person (i–iii) with an opinion (A–E) about how to tackle loneliness by writing the correct letter in each box.**

**There are two opinions that you do NOT need.**

**\*\*answers to Q 8 are found in paragraphs 5-7\*\***

**Hint:** Answers to these type of questions (opinion match) are usually found in the later paragraphs so look there first.

7. **According to Collet**, loneliness needs to be understood from the perspective of those most vulnerable. Protecting public transport, particularly bus routes, is essential, in his view. “Local authorities and bus companies might want to close a bus stop, stating that it’s only a five-minute walk to the next stop — but it’s not five minutes if you’ve got arthritis,” he says. The other big question, linked to good transport, **is a sense of safety**. He goes on to explain that many elderly customers are **concerned about leaving the house** and they need to be able to travel safely **and feel they are in a secure environment**.

8. But will the tables get people talking? On a rainy Monday morning, with the new signs in place, there were no takers. The conversation about loneliness is still waiting to begin.

**(i) Edward Collet (paragraph 7) D**

**(ii) Rupa Graham (paragraph 5) C**

**(iii) Leigh Brown (paragraph 6) B**

**A reduce media coverage of social isolation**

**B increase spending from local authorities**

**C encourage different age groups to spend time together**

**D reduce people’s concerns about going out**

**E increase the number of bus routes in towns**

Question 9: Tick (✓) the correct answer from the options listed below (refer to **the whole text** for your answer).

**Q 9. The main focus of this article is:**

A What Sainsbury's is doing for the elderly (No, not just the elderly but lonely people of all ages)

B The effects of loneliness in modern Britain (No, the main focus isn't the effects of loneliness)

C The government's new policy on loneliness (No, the UK government's new policy is mentioned briefly but it's not the main focus)

**D Strategies for tackling the problem of loneliness** (ideas for solving (strategies) the problem of loneliness are mentioned throughout the article so this is the main focus) **Correct!**