



Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation in Worcestershire

Action Plan

2024 – 2027

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Section 1: Understanding Loneliness & social isolation

Loneliness and Social Isolation are not the same. People can be socially isolated but not feel lonely. People can also feel lonely when they are surrounded by others.

Loneliness



Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact



Loneliness is a subjective measure. It is measured by asking people how they feel



Loneliness is tackled by increasing an individual's social connectedness, improving their wellbeing or changing their perspective

Social Isolation



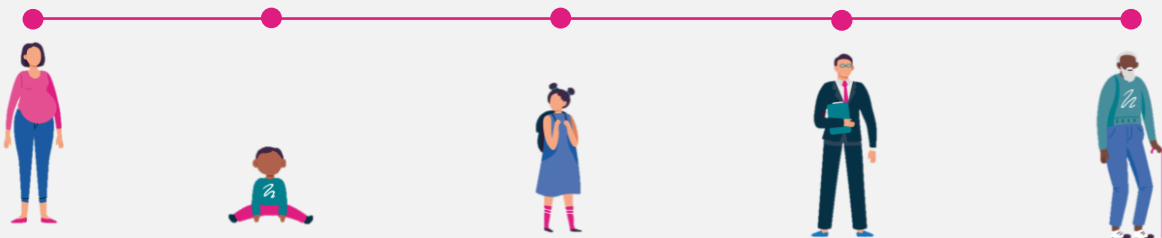
Social Isolation is a lack of social connections or being physically separated from others



Social Isolation is an objective measure. It is measured directly by counting the number of interactions a person has



Social Isolation is tackled by increasing the number of interactions a person has or enlarging their social network



Loneliness and social isolation **can affect anyone**, anytime throughout life. Many factors can increase the likelihood of people experiencing them.

Why are loneliness and isolation important to tackle?

Chronic or severe loneliness – when people feel lonely often or always – can have a long-lasting and negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing.¹ [Research](#)² and [evidence](#)³ highlights these potential impacts, some of which are listed below:



Cardiovascular disease



Anxiety & depression



Lower perceived quality of life



Comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day



Cognitive decline & dementia



Increased health and social care use



Unhealthy behaviours



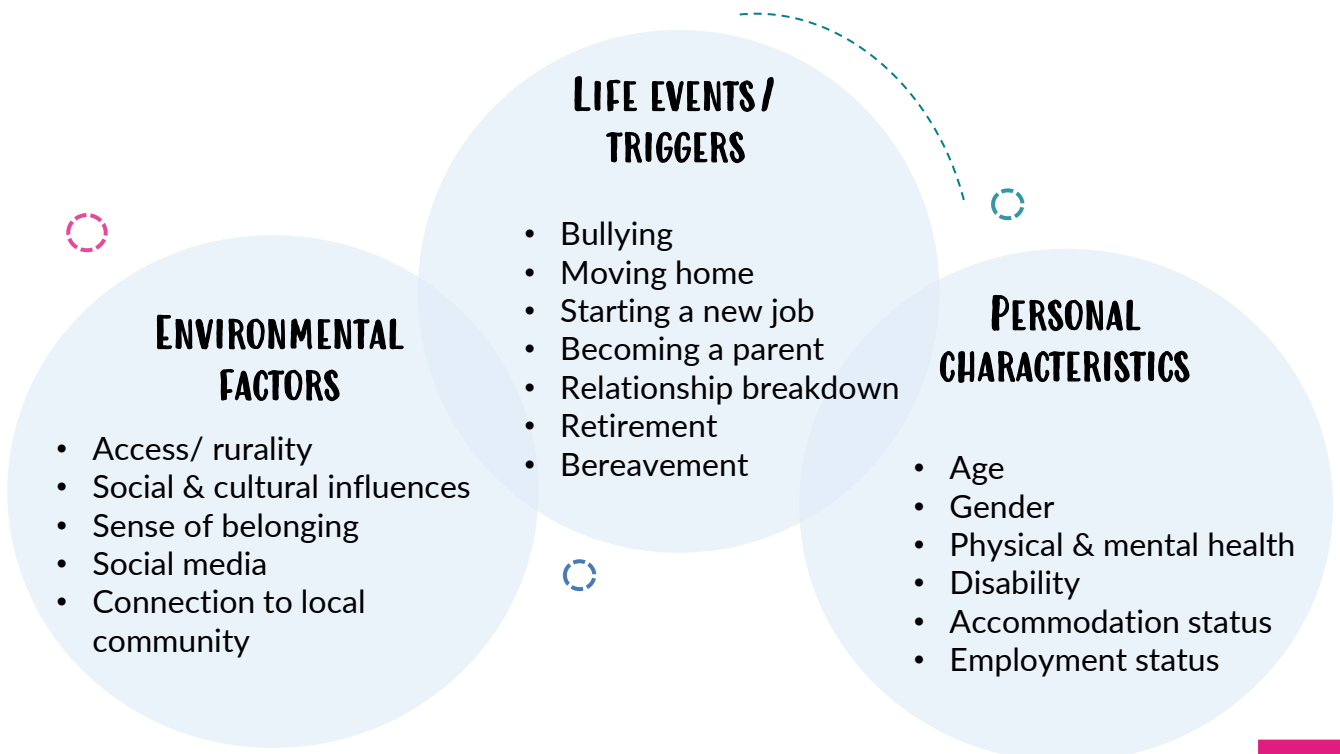
Suicidal thoughts



Premature death

Causes of loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness and isolation are individual experiences; however, a combination of life events (or triggers), environmental factors and personal circumstances may contribute. Examples of these are outlined in the graph below:



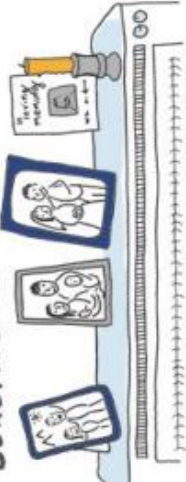
"Loneliness doesn't discriminate"

- JO COX

CERTAIN LIFE EVENTS CAN MAKE US MORE LIKELY TO FEEL LONELY

- HERE ARE SOME...

BEREAVEMENT



ENTERING A PERIOD OF POOR HEALTH



BECOMING HOMELESS



LEAVING CARE



SCHOOLS



BULLYING



MOVING JOBS



MOVING HOME

LOSING A JOB

EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION



CHILDREN LEAVING HOME



RETIREMENT

MOVING INTO CARE



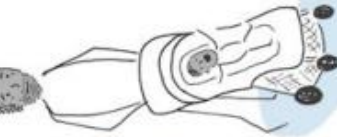
DIVORCE & RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN



REFUGEES -AWAITING ASYLUM



BECOMING A PARENT



BECOMING A CARER



LIVING WITH DISABILITY



MAKING CONNECTIONS



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

#loneliness

2016/17



Section 2: Loneliness & social isolation in Worcestershire

National evidence

Research has revealed that Worcestershire has the second lowest rate of loneliness in England. According to a sample of 3,410 adults (aged 16+) who responded to the [Active Lives Survey](#) (2023), **4.7%** report feeling lonely “often or always” (i.e., chronically lonely), in comparison to a national average of 6.8%.

However, we know that loneliness can often go unreported, and we are not being complacent. Tackling loneliness and social isolation continues to be a priority for Worcestershire and work continues to address these issues.

Who is at greater risk?

[Research](#)⁶ and [evidence](#)⁷ tells us that those at greater risk of loneliness and isolation include people:

- aged 16 to 24 years
- with poor mental wellbeing
- with a long-term health condition or disability
- who live alone
- experiencing bereavement
- who are unemployed
- on lower incomes
- from ethnic minority communities
- living in rural communities
- from the LGBTQ+ community
- with caring responsibilities

Community consultation: the importance of social isolation and relationships during the pandemic

The pandemic increased loneliness and isolation across all age groups but particularly in the elderly, young people, and those living in rural areas. Suggestions to improve this include provision of free and accessible activities, groups and services and increased access to self-help resources.



said 'social isolation and relationships' when asked what has been negatively affected throughout the pandemic - JLHWS Consultation Survey (2022)



“I was so lonely, the loneliness and lack of contact with others was overwhelming at times”
“I was really isolated, not seeing my friends was the worst bit after all I used to see them all day through the week”
“Felt alone a lot, even having a partner/children/other family members” - Covid 19 Impact Focus Groups (2022)

Worcestershire: demographics and geography

[Data](#)⁸ shows that Worcestershire has an ageing population, with the number of people aged 65-plus being almost 23%. In terms of geography, Worcestershire is almost 85% rural by area and [data](#)⁹ suggests that approximately 27% of the population live in these areas. Without effective connections, those living in these rural spaces can be at greater risk of loneliness and isolation.

Section 3: Reviewing the evidence

Mental Health Needs Assessment

A [Mental Health Needs Assessment](#)¹⁰ has been carried out for Worcestershire, by reviewing national and local evidence, including engagement with the public.

The findings are already helping to improve services, more effectively allocate resources and develop creative interventions to support people's mental health and wellbeing. Key messages regarding loneliness and isolation include:

- Loneliness and isolation are associated with poorer wellbeing and higher rates of mental health problems. They may be a cause and consequence of each other
- Older people may be more likely to be socially isolated. However, there is evidence that young adults now report experiences of loneliness most commonly
- There are significant overlaps with other influences on mental health and wellbeing. Loneliness is more commonly reported by those with long term health conditions and by their carers

Recommendations

The Mental Health Needs Assessment highlights a series of recommendations. Many opportunities exist to build and enhance social connections in Worcestershire. These may be focused around other activities which support wellbeing. In addition to targeted support to address loneliness in higher risk groups, broader actions that promote social interaction should also be supported.

Community connections

Actions that bring people together make a positive contribution to wellbeing

- **Universal: Asset based approaches**
Continue to develop asset-based approaches to empower communities to create new opportunities that promote wellbeing
- **Universal: Community assets**
Enhance opportunities for social connection and wider wellbeing through council run community assets including libraries and museums

Developing information for action

A deeper understanding of mental health needs and assets in some specific areas will help to target provision more effectively

- **Wellbeing and loneliness**
A more detailed understanding of the distribution of loneliness/ isolation and those experiencing poorer wellbeing, as well as community perspectives on what will help most, could guide more effective targeting of wellbeing provision in Worcestershire



Section 4: Our Action Plan

The Tackling Loneliness Partnership

Tackling loneliness, social isolation and health inequalities has been a priority in Worcestershire for several years. This has been reinforced in the [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy \(2022-2032\)](#),¹¹ which focuses upon what we all need to be mentally healthy. Work to support this priority is overseen by the Tackling Loneliness Partnership. This is a system-wide forum that brings together a range of partners from the County and District Councils, the NHS and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. Since the Partnership's development, several action plans have been produced which have led to the creation of local initiatives, such as the Stay Connected pledge. Work continues to understand local need and shape projects which aim to increase connections through a variety of opportunities.

Spotlight: The Stay Connected pledge

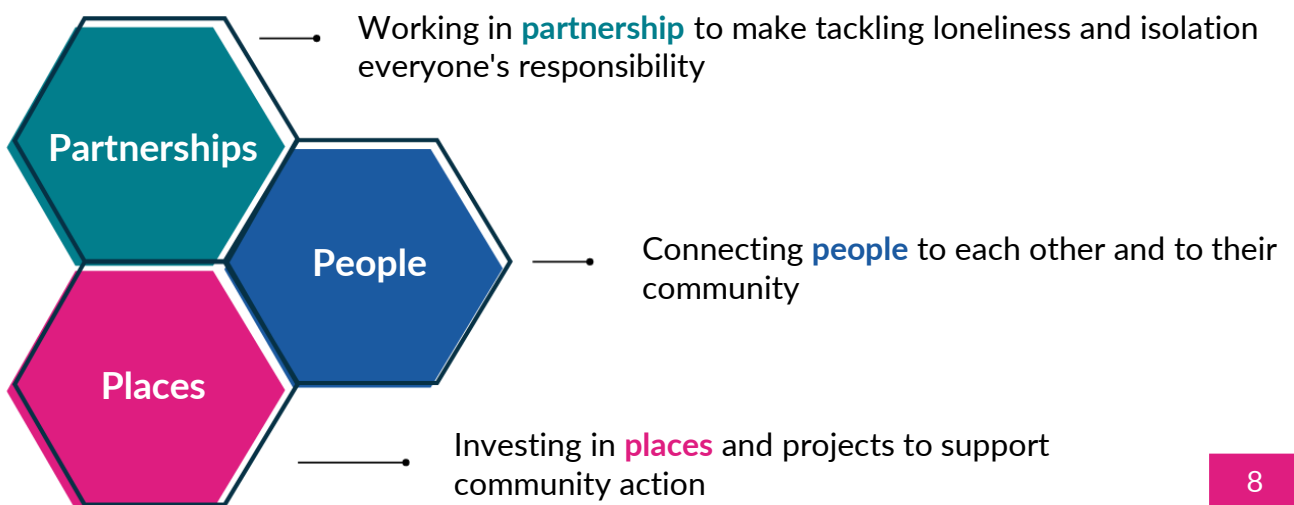
The [Stay Connected pledge](#)¹² aims to help put an end to loneliness by helping organisations to support people to feel more connected, less isolated, and ultimately healthier. Any organisation can join Stay Connected and help their employees, customers and local communities make and maintain positive social connections.

Stay Connected
Putting an end to loneliness



Priorities

After considering the evidence on the causes of loneliness and isolation, reviewing the findings of the Mental Health Needs Assessment, and suggestions from organisations and residents, this action plan is structured around three key areas which align with the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The action plan cannot work in isolation as loneliness can affect anyone at any age, so the Partnership will work closely with partners and strategies across Worcestershire.



Priority 1: Working in partnership to make tackling loneliness and isolation everyone's responsibility

We want to raise awareness of the importance of social connections to people's well-being and encourage individuals and organisations to recognise and identify loneliness. We also want people to challenge the associated stigma and act for their own and others' benefit.

Raise awareness of loneliness and isolation across Worcestershire

- Continue to gather insight and feedback from communities about loneliness and isolation, particularly in high-risk groups.
- Champion loneliness and isolation among partnership networks and forums, including the Being Well Strategic Group, District Collaboratives and VCSE networks to help raise awareness.
- Ensure this action plan is aligned with the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Work closely with partners to ensure strategies and plans align with this action plan, including but not limited to, the Suicide Prevention Approach and All-age Autism Strategy.

Raise awareness of the importance of social connections and reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness

- Continue to support National Campaigns to help raise awareness of loneliness and isolation.
- Work with partners to launch a county-wide campaign to tackle the stigmas associated with loneliness and isolation.

Spotlight: Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy

This [five-year strategy](#)¹³ is underpinned by a vision of **“supporting individuals to live the lives they choose, in a place they call home, connected to people, places and opportunities that are meaningful to them”** – Mark Fitton, Director of Adult Social Services

The strategy aims to enable people to live life well, using the great resources available in the local community. One of the key priorities has a focus on reducing loneliness and social isolation.



Priority 1: Working in partnership to make tackling loneliness and isolation everyone's responsibility, continued...

Engage local services, businesses and residents in actions to combat loneliness and social isolation

- Celebrate community stories that highlight resident-led action which tackles loneliness and isolation and share learning to inform future service provision.
- Continue to promote the Stay Connected pledge to encourage organisations to embed actions to tackle loneliness and isolation in their day-to-day provision.
- Champion the Work Well Live Better programme to tackle loneliness and isolation within businesses and help create a healthier Worcestershire Workforce.

Improve how we measure and identify loneliness and social isolation

- Explore opportunities for training and raising awareness of loneliness and isolation in the VCSE sector.
- Encourage health and care professionals to complete the [Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation eLearning session by NHS England](#).¹⁴
- Promote the use of the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) measure and University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) loneliness scale among services in Worcestershire to help gain a more detailed understanding of loneliness and isolation within the population.

Spotlight: Celebrating Community Stories, Our Community Can, Hampton Lovett

The [Our Community Can project](#) supports rural communities to develop and introduce physical and creative activities which help reduce loneliness and social isolation. The project has worked with Hampton Lovett residents to develop a weekly exercise group as well as a fun activity session 'Game For A Laugh' to bring the community together.

"It's good that people can get out into the community and not be sitting at home in this horrid weather. You need to get out and about and meet people. We've had a good laugh. It was great fun. Everyone really enjoyed it" - Resident and volunteer



Priority 2: Connecting people to each other and to their community

There are a number and range of opportunities for people to connect within their communities. We want to ensure people have an awareness of them and encourage and facilitate people to use them. Particularly those who are at greater risk of loneliness. We also want to raise awareness of the role digital technology can play in providing support and connecting people to their communities.

Raise awareness of local community groups, activities, and support.

- Promote the Worcestershire County Council [Community Services Directory](#)¹⁶ and other local directories to ensure a range of accessible information about local support.
- Ensure we actively promote community hubs and resident-led activities that support social connections.
- Make use of existing networks, partnerships and newsletters to regularly promote new and existing opportunities for people to connect.
- Raise awareness of [community transport](#)¹⁷ options to help people access community spaces.

Tailor support and opportunities to those at greater risk of loneliness

Given Worcestershire's ageing and rural population, local evidence and findings of the Mental Health Needs Assessment, the Partnership will focus on specific groups. Some examples are listed below:

▪ Young people

- ❑ Explore opportunities in education-based settings to help young adults develop social and emotional skills to prevent loneliness.
- ❑ Explore opportunities to support young people leaving care to prevent isolation.
- ❑ Support projects that will prevent crime and anti-social behaviour by increasing young people's engagement in physical activity or mental wellbeing projects through the Youth Innovation Fund.

▪ New/ single parents

- ❑ Raise awareness of the Family Hubs offer to support new parents, including parenting and community groups.
- ❑ Promote the 'Virtual Family Hub' which provides a range of accessible information and support.

▪ Older/ isolated adults

- ❑ Promote befriending services to more effectively support isolated individuals.
- ❑ Work with Districts to ensure those living in rural areas are supported to make connections and reduce isolation.
- ❑ Explore initiatives to create opportunities for face-to-face interactions among hard-to-reach individuals and encourage more integrated and engaged communities.



Priority 2: Connecting people to each other and to their community, continued...

Encourage the use of digital technology to increase connections

- Encourage the use of public computers and free Wifi in public spaces, for example [Libraries](#),¹⁸ to help those who can't access the internet at home get online.
- Promote Library services, for example the [Online Library Hub](#)¹⁹ and [Digital Champions](#)²⁰ to help people access a variety of support and facilitate social ties.
- Work with partners to understand how we can support residents through the 2025 digital switchover to ensure they remain supported and digitally connected.
- Ensure printed signposting resources are provided, so those that don't have access to digital technology are still supported.

Spotlight: Libraries Unlocked

Libraries Unlocked provides more flexibility for customers and community groups to use their local library at times that are convenient to them, such as before or after work and on previously closed days.

“Libraries Unlocked has enabled me to work with residents and partner with other organisations to hold events and activities to support the local community. This would not have been possible without longer library opening hours and free access to library space” – Community Builder

Spotlight: Digital Switchover Partner Toolkit

The Local Government Association (LGA) have designed a toolkit for councils and partners to use to raise awareness of the digital switchover.

“The landline switchover has serious implications for... vulnerable residents who may not have an internet connection or mobile phones” – [The LGA](#)²¹



Priority 3: Investing in places and projects to support community action

Increasingly we understand the importance of places within communities in helping people interact with others. We want to raise awareness of these spaces and create opportunities to enhance existing and develop new activities that bring people together.

Take an Asset Based Approach to unlock the potential of community spaces

- Work with communities to maximise opportunities for social connection within local assets. For example, community venues, green spaces, libraries and museums.
- Promote community-based programmes such as Healthy Worcestershire that bring residents together who may be lonely and/or isolated.
- Support community partnerships and networks that bring together local VCSE organisations and local services.



Spotlight: Healthy Worcestershire

The Healthy Worcestershire Programme will be delivered by [Solutions 4 Health](#)²² and will offer an integrated range of health improvement services in a way that brings people together and builds social connections. Weekly sessions will be run in local venues within the heart of communities. They will offer strength and balance programmes, healthy lifestyle advice, community safety information and links to a wide range of other health promoting activities in the local community. Grants will be made available to establish activities and programmes that are co-produced with residents.

“The new Programme will engage with all our communities for better health outcomes and will provide a positive experience for our residents” - Councillor Karen May

Spotlight: Health Walks

The [Worcestershire Health Walks](#)²³ programme offers free short group walks led by trained volunteers. Health Walks take place across the county and are a great way to explore our Green Flag award winning parks and green spaces.

“After having a Cardiac Arrest walking has become important to maintain my fitness. It gets me out and about, a purpose for getting up and getting moving” - Health Walk Volunteer



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Priority 3: Investing in places and projects to support community action, continued...

Invest in community led action that tackles loneliness and social isolation

- Raise awareness of funding opportunities to enable increased activities that support social connections and improved wellbeing. For example:
 - Healthy Worcestershire Grants
 - [The Stay Connected Community Grant](#)²⁴
 - [The Youth Innovation Fund](#)²⁵
 - [The Educational Innovation Fund](#)²⁶
 - The Microgrants Scheme
- Promote the [Community projects and funding](#)²⁷ webpage, which offers useful information and guidance on how to find and apply for funding.



Spotlight: The Stay Connected Community Grant

The [Stay Connected Community Grant](#)²⁴ invites community-based organisations across Worcestershire to apply for funding of £250 up to £2500 to create or expand projects which aim to tackle loneliness and/or isolation. The grant has supported a wide variety of projects to date, including community cafes, support groups and art, physical activity and nature-based projects.

“Thank you so much! We are delighted to be offered this funding and can't wait to get our dads' group off the ground and bring new fathers together” – Becoming Families

Spotlight: Microgrants Scheme

The WCC microgrant scheme allows individuals, groups and smaller volunteer-led organisations to apply for pots of up to £250 to deliver resident-led activities that can help connect people and improve mental wellbeing.

“It's more than just stitching old clothes together, the group deal with loneliness and isolation. Members have experienced personal loss themselves & is their way of helping others who are going through the same.” – Group Member

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Section 5: Delivery and monitoring

Delivering the action plan

Statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations, communities, and individuals all have a role to play in delivering this action plan and achieving outcomes. To achieve our vision, action is required by all members of the Tackling Loneliness Partnership. It is essential to work together to ensure the action plan is implemented. This action plan will feed into the delivery of the [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#),¹¹ which includes a focus on prevention, the wider determinants of health and tackling health inequalities. The Loneliness Partnership Board will report to the Health and Wellbeing Board via the Being Well Strategic Group on the progress made on a regular basis.

Monitoring progress

A range of outcomes and indicators are being used to measure the impact of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including local data, engagement, feedback and case studies. This outcomes framework, which includes measures for loneliness and social isolation, will give an overall view of the progress and improvement towards delivering the action plan. Monitoring these measures throughout the life of the plan will help to determine its impact. In addition to monitoring this framework, we will continue to engage with communities and individuals who live and work in Worcestershire, focusing on those who are underserved, thereby addressing health inequalities. This will ensure there are ongoing and meaningful conversations about loneliness and isolation and that lived experience insights are central to decision making, project design and delivery.

Measure	Data Set	Description	Value	Year	Next release
Loneliness	Active Lives Survey ⁵	% Adults (16+) who feel lonely 'often/always'	4.7%	2021-22	TBC
Social Isolation	PHOF: Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework ²⁸	% of people who use adult social care services who reported they had as much social contact as they would like	50.6%	2022-23	Expected December 2024
Loneliness & Isolation	Worcestershire Insights ²⁹	Community Stories			N/A

Helpful Links

For more information, please visit Worcestershire County Council's Loneliness and isolation [webpages](#).³⁰ Additionally, if you would like to receive health information to help improve the health and wellbeing of local communities, please sign up to our [Health Champions Newsletter](#).³¹

Section 6: References and links

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