what works
wellbeing

LONELINESS

What we know (so far)

An overview of evidence reviews:
the effectiveness of interventions to
address loneliness at all stages of the
life-course

1. What is loneliness?

2. What this review is (and is not!)

3. State of the evidence

4. Specific interventions

5. Now what?

1. What is loneliness?

- Common experience

- Affected by life events

- Being lonely can become a serious issue when it becomes a day-to-day reality as it's important for our health and wellbeing, and the way we function in our communities

It is different to **social isolation**

Loneliness is an experience, and is subjective

Loneliness occurs when there is a gap between our *actual* and *desired* social relationships...

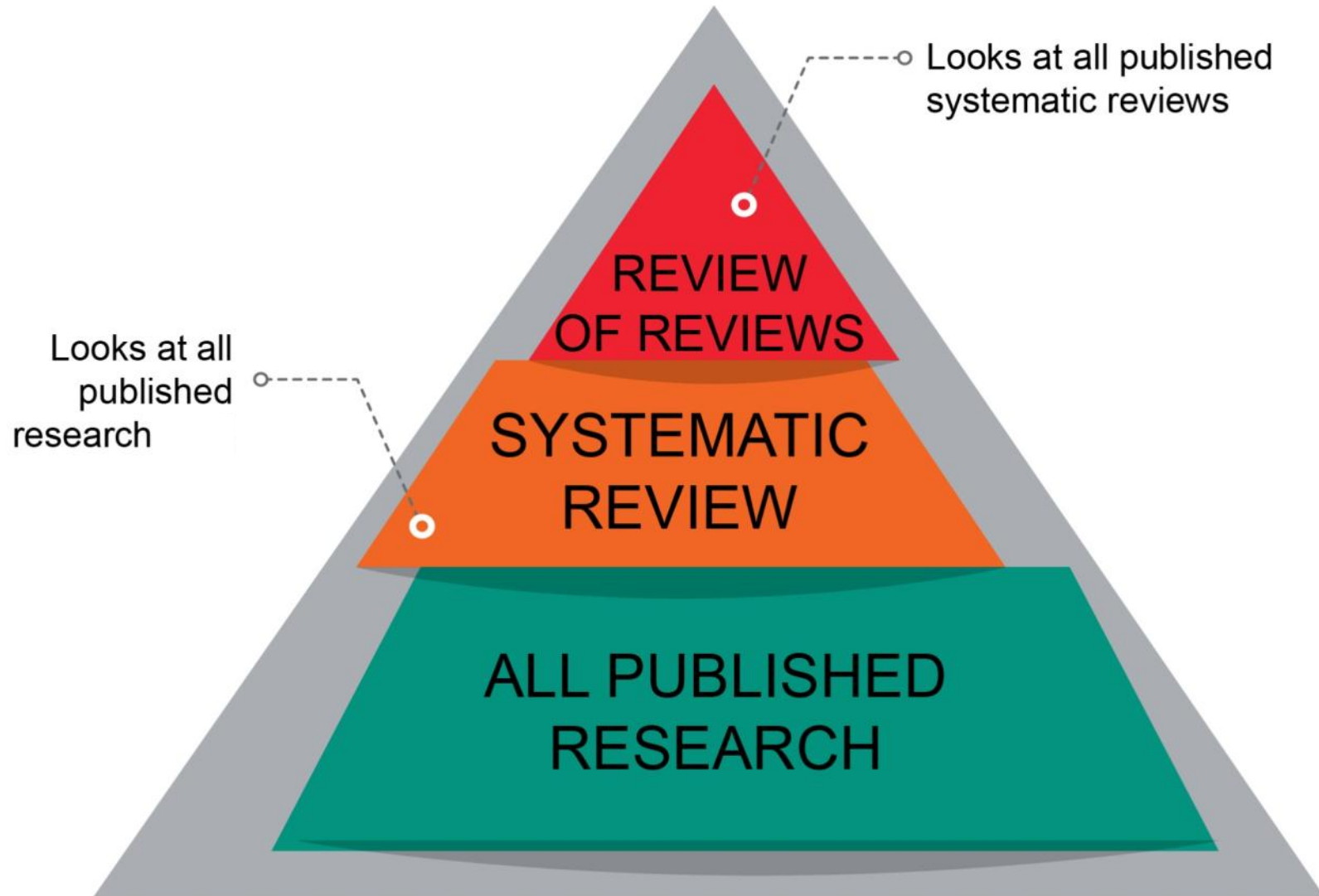... and when the quality or quantity of these relationships does not meet our expectations

It affects wellbeing at all ages

but high-quality research aimed at assessing effectiveness focuses on older age.

2. What this review is (and is not!)

Looks at all published
systematic reviews

REVIEW
OF REVIEWS

Looks at all
published
research

SYSTEMATIC
REVIEW

ALL PUBLISHED
RESEARCH

This **review of reviews** begins the process of mapping the evidence base and identifying the potential gaps and areas to focus on.

The review asked the question:

What is the effectiveness of interventions to alleviate loneliness in people of all ages across the life-course?

The review ONLY includes studies that:

had controlled designs

measured loneliness
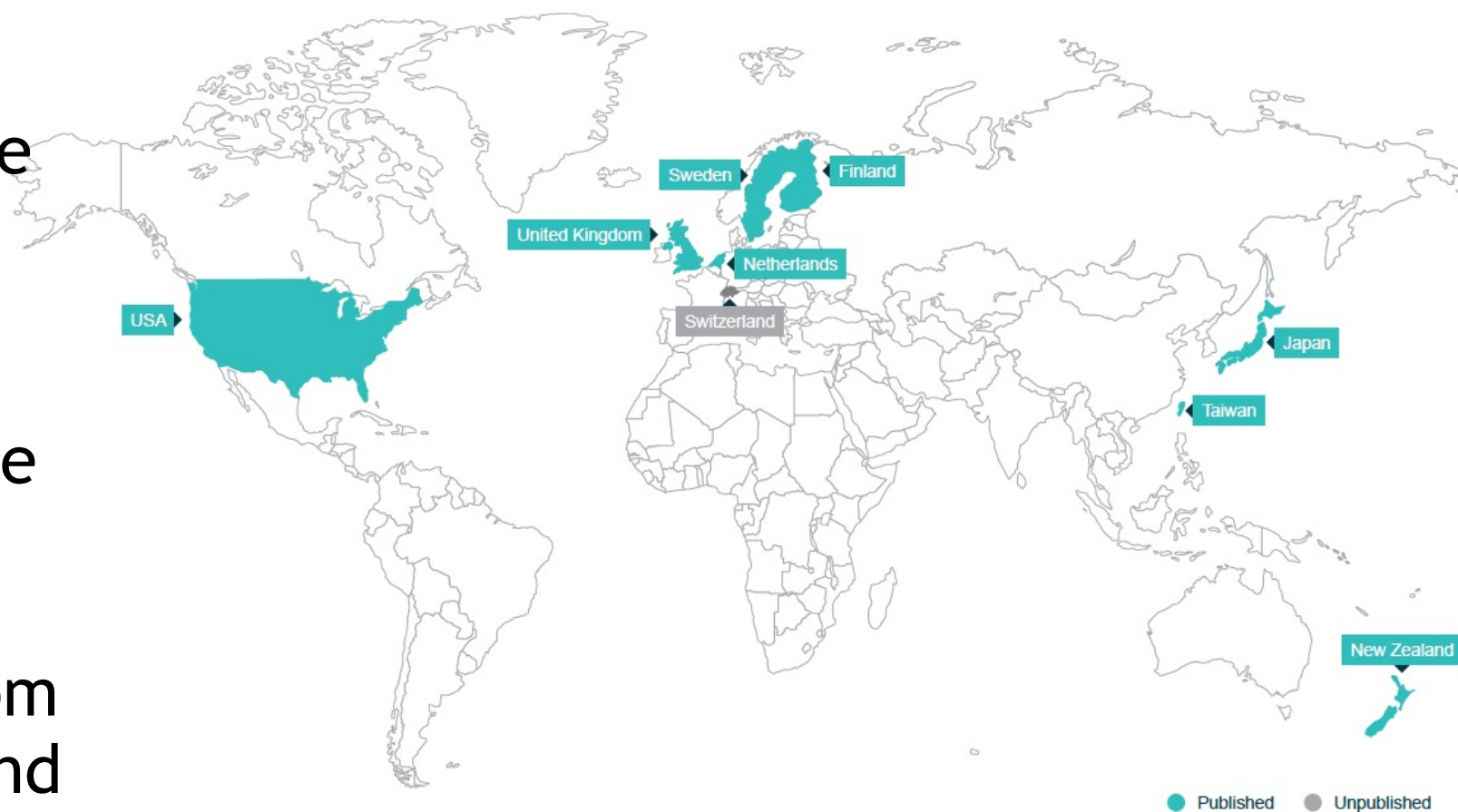
were published in the last 10 years

However, it does include insights from unpublished research and evaluations conducted in the UK.

There were 364 reviews to sift through.

Published findings come from the USA, the Netherlands, Finland, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Taiwan and the UK.

Unpublished papers from England, Wales, Scotland and Switzerland.

Because evidence could only be found for older adults

these findings focus on over-55s.

3. State of the evidence

It's hard to compare results because of the

variability of types of

INTERVENTION

SETTING

and

MEASURES USED

Future research is needed on how loneliness

impacts different

ages

ethnicities

socio-economic groups

Building on existing community assets and networks to reduce loneliness was a key feature in a number of the interventions

We need to find out how loneliness relates to

other mediating factors, such as

SOCIAL CONNECTION

and

SOCIAL SUPPORT

More, large-scale, controlled studies

would allow us to draw solid conclusions

3. Specific interventions

One size will not fit all

Inconclusive evidence on one-to-one versus group-based interventions

People with high levels of loneliness benefitted the most from loneliness interventions

We don't yet know what approaches alleviate loneliness

But several mechanisms for reducing loneliness were identified

- Tailor interventions
- Avoid stigma
- Support meaningful relationships

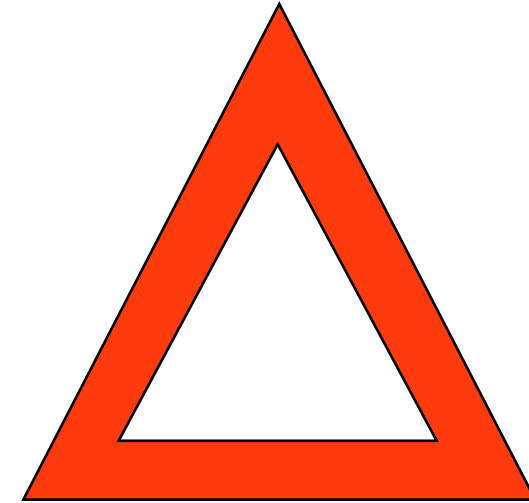# Understanding the findings

No effect found

Effect inconclusive

Positive effect

P Published studies

G Grey literature or unpublished studies

Please note that this categorisation isn't a robust assessment of effectiveness of the different interventions. It's a way to categorise the different activities and highlight what we know about them.

Remember! These findings **only cover the interventions included in the studies** looked at by the review.

It does not cover ALL interventions.

The approaches reviewed

leisure activities

therapies

social and community interventions

alleviating loneliness

educational approaches

befriending

system-wide activities

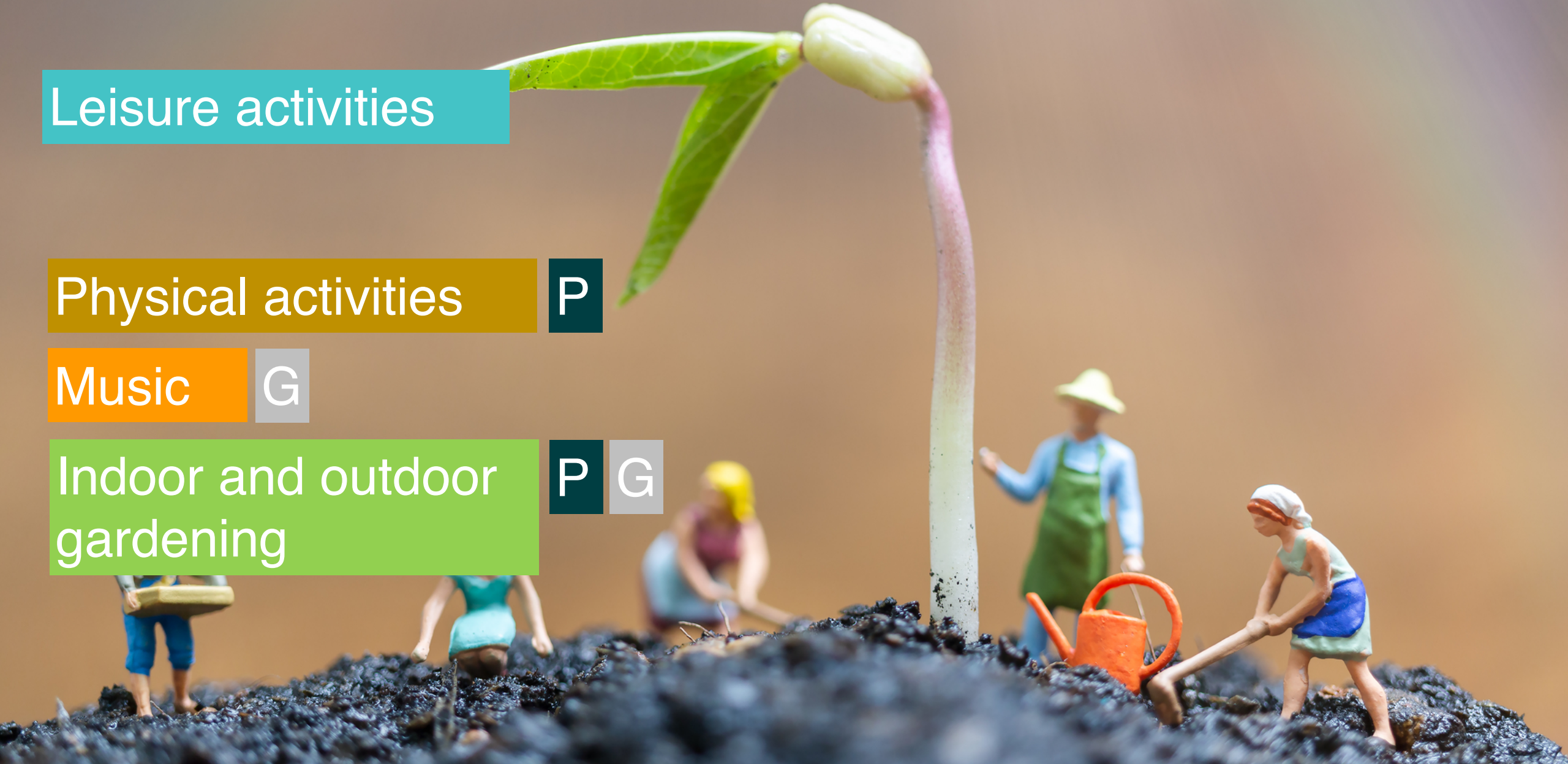**Leisure activities**

Physical activities P

Music G

Indoor and outdoor gardening P G

Therapies

Animal assisted therapy **P**

Reminiscence therapy **P**

Cognitive enhancement **P**

Humour therapy **P**

Social and community interventions
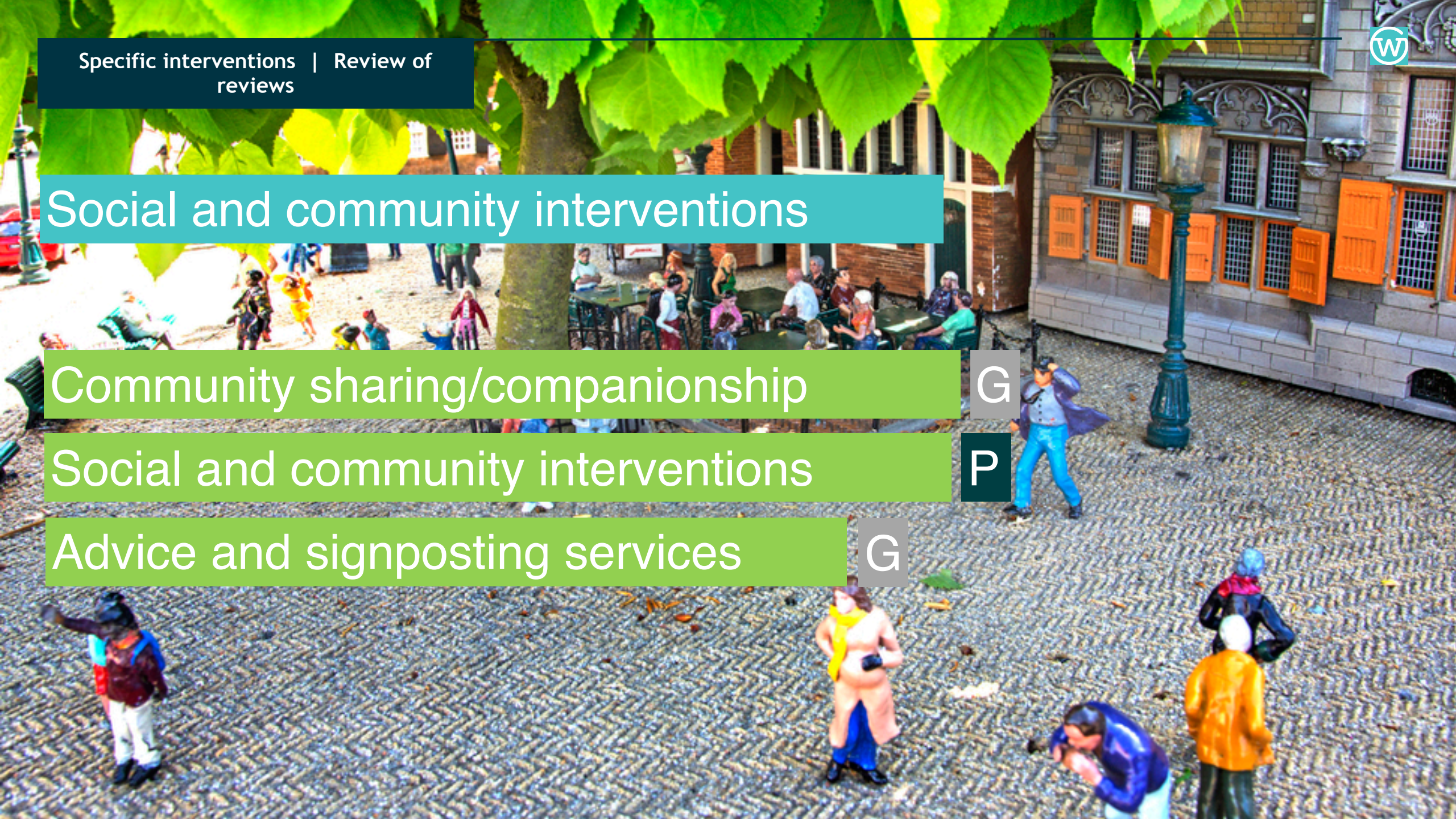
Community sharing/companionship G

Social and community interventions P

Advice and signposting services G

Educational approaches

Relationship training   P
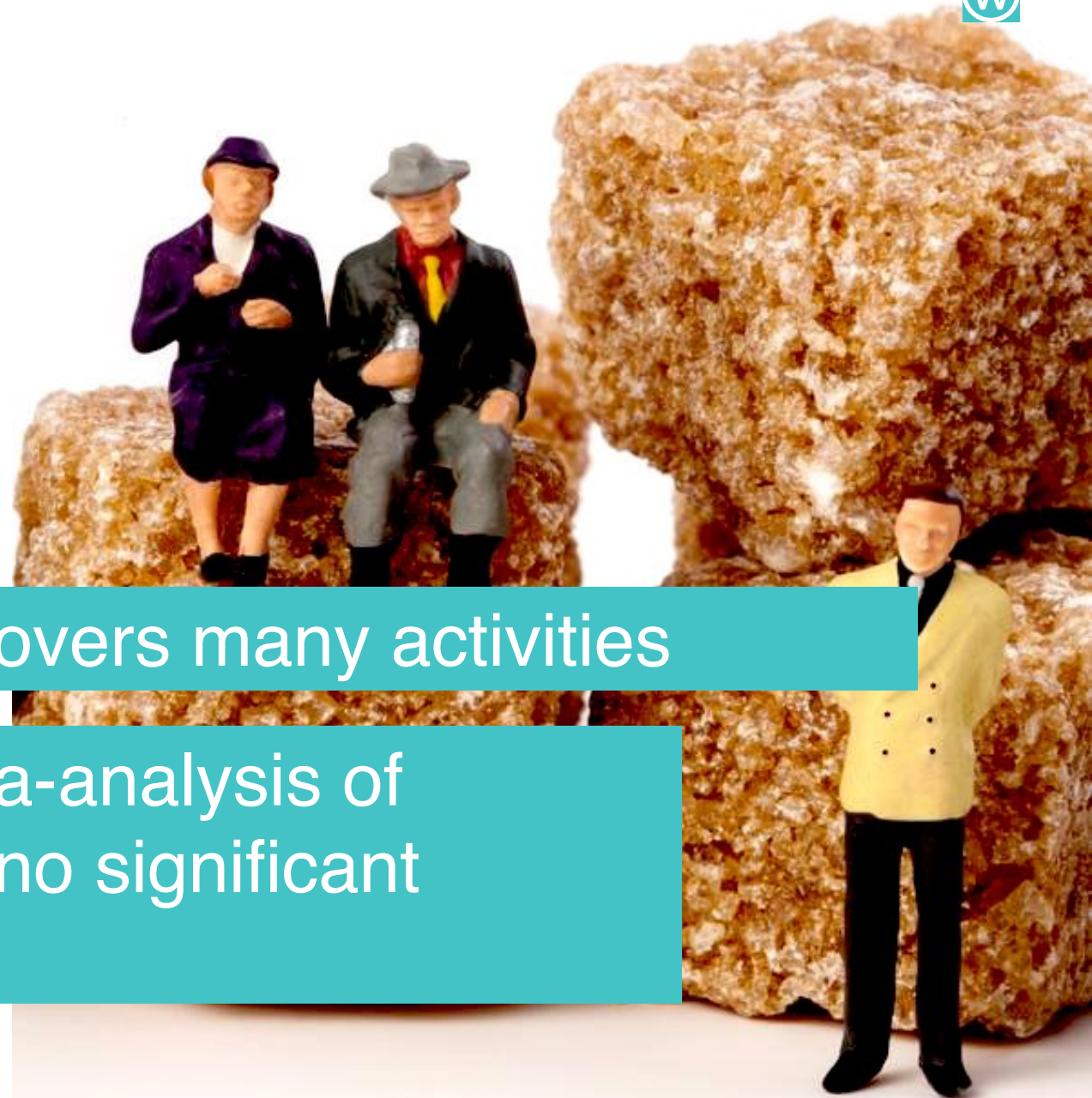
Self-management   P

Skills training   P   G

Befriending   P

It's a complex picture

Most commonly reviewed, but covers many activities

One systematic review and meta-analysis of befriending interventions found no significant benefit.
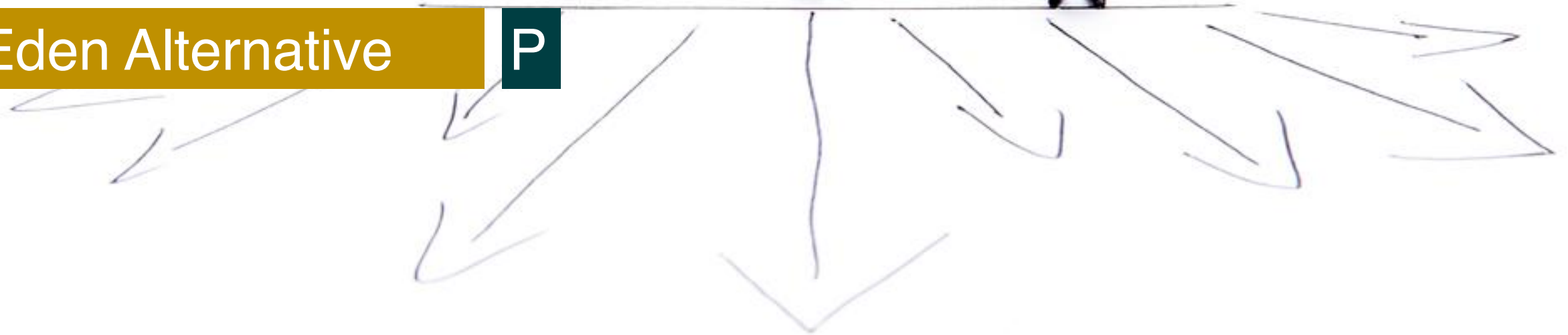
System-wide approaches
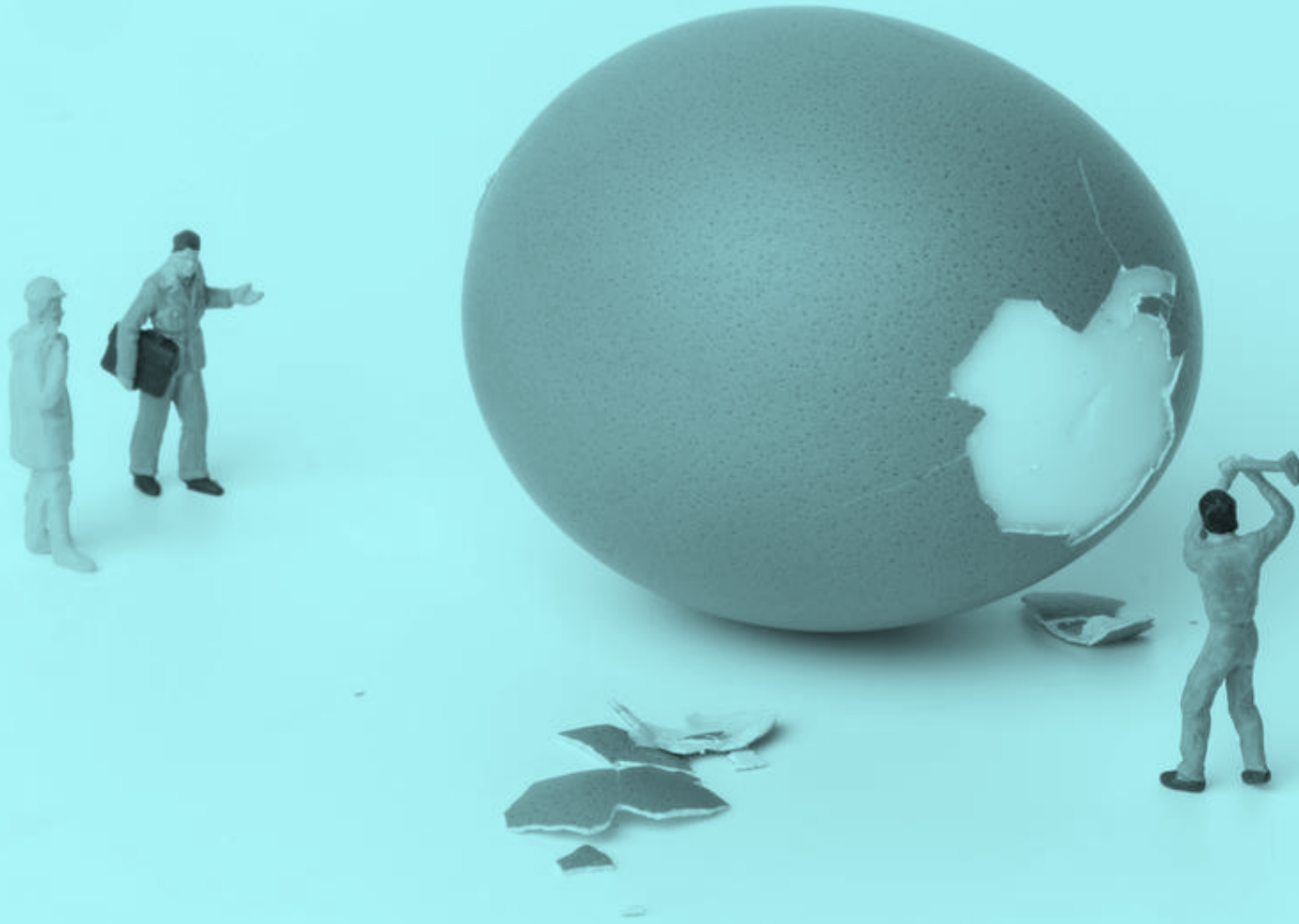
4R programmes P

Eden Alternative P

5. Now what?

This review is a **first step**

We need to:

Develop a conceptual and theoretical framework for loneliness

Use and report on an appropriate set of loneliness measures

Improve, build up and track progress of the evidence base

What works in practice:

● **Build the evidence base**: Fill the evidence gaps and move the evidence base forward through well-designed, rigorous and appropriate research methods.

● **Intervention design**: use a tailored approach, avoid stigma, support meaningful relationships

● **Monitoring and evaluation**: plan how to collect evidence - be clear about what you are measuring, use consistent, comparable measures.

What works in policy:

● **Consider** how social connection and loneliness relate to the objectives of the
     policy, programme or project and how they can be supported at the margins.

● **Include** social connection and loneliness when developing and shortlisting
     options.

● **Explore** how better social connection and reduced loneliness can help achieve other outcomes.

● **Understand** and compare the social impacts on different groups.

● **Build** social connection, wellbeing or loneliness measures into pilots,
     evaluations and research.

Supportive social relationships are essential to human wellbeing.

Their quality is not just dependent on individual circumstances, but is substantially influenced by society.

It might be tempting to treat loneliness solely as an individual phenomenon. However we must widen our understanding of loneliness to appreciate the social and situational factors involved.

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Thank you

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