

Dealing with Loneliness



Forty studies between 1950 and 2016 found a significant association between social isolation, loneliness and poor mental health so it is important to take care of your mental health during this period of reduced social interaction.

It is normal to be stressed by being house-bound and not interacting with people, but this can exacerbate the underlying stress of worrying that you may catch coronavirus. These factors can increase your chances of developing mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.

Lockdown can get you 'down' especially when it starts to feel like cabin fever. You may feel stigmatised if you are isolated, feel that your freedoms have been taken away and cannot see loved ones.

Older adults, especially those over 65, are more vulnerable to loneliness. They are more likely to isolate themselves out of fear of being infected.

There are many strategies you can utilise to maintain your well-being and mental health. For the most part, it's about finding ways to distract, stay busy, and connect with others, regardless of the circumstances.

Here are some of the best ways to get through a period of isolation.

If you are isolated at home, try to stick to a regular schedule as much as possible. Loneliness can feel like it never ends, so try to make every day as normal as possible to help you get through it.

Start each day by planning a few things you can do like writing a daily diary of how you feel and what you are doing, and keeping a symptom log if you are unwell.

Don't forget that your physical health and mental health are intertwined. If you live in isolation for weeks and don't get any exercise, it can have a negative impact on your ability to cope.

Another factor of feeling lonely is the loss of a sense of meaning. You will find that you not only feel bored, but also lose your sense of self. This loss of meaning can affect you both physically and mentally. Doing something meaningful every day, even for a short period, can give you a sense of identity. Activities can include enrolling in a course, becoming an online volunteer or starting an online interest group.

The best thing you can do to combat loneliness and periods of isolation is to connect with others. Just because you are unable to visit family or friends in person doesn't mean you can't connect via handwritten letter or postcard, telephone, video chat, texting and message services.

You can also connect with a myriad of groups online. These include Facebook groups, online forums and hobby groups.

If you find it hard to express how you feel, channelling your feelings into creative means can be cathartic. Expressing yourself this way can also be therapeutic, whether it's painting, writing or dancing. There is a reason why artists enjoy being swept away by their work. Moreover, when you create, you enter a creative 'magical' zone, which is a form of meditation in itself.

Finding healthy distractions is another way to promote mental health. This can take the form of reading, writing, watching new shows and listening to music, art, or other activities of interest. You could also learn a new recipe or remodel a room in your house.

Practice self-compassion in difficult times. Remember God loves you! Pray, read the bible, and read inspiring stories and magazines.

Plan and do things that help you focus on the future. It may feel as if loneliness lasts forever, but there will come a time when you will return to your familiar routine.

You may say things like, "I don't feel that way anymore," which suppresses difficult emotions and perpetuates your loneliness. Instead of resisting your feelings, find a way to accept that they will come and go. Remember that your feelings can and will change. This will help to strip them of their power and alleviate their misfortune.

If you are in a bad mental state after a period of isolation due to the coronavirus and are unable to rid yourself of anxiety or depression, it is important to seek help.

And remember, always be kind to yourself!