

Coping with isolation during COVID-19

Humans are social beings, and the social distancing that is necessary to flatten the coronavirus curve is hard on everyone. The forced change in social behavior and the resulting isolation can affect people's mental health in many ways. Whether you are home alone, with a sick family member or with kids out of school, isolation can increase stress and anxiety.

Depending on your situation, isolation can impact you in different ways. From loneliness to feeling cramped, dealing with these feelings on top of worrying about the COVID-19 outbreak can be overwhelming.

General tips

- Keep in touch with your social support groups virtually through social media, FaceTime, Skype, online games and other digital platforms.
- If the weather is nice, go outside and get some fresh air. Maintain a 6-foot distance from others.
- Stay busy. Read, play games or work on a project.
- Decrease the time you spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.
- Draw on skills that you have used during difficult times in the past to manage your emotions. That may include deep breathing, meditation, positive self-talk, etc.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Stay hydrated, eat nutritious meals, exercise and get enough sleep.
- Avoid using tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions.
- Access information that can help you cope with stress, worry and confusion during the pandemic.
- Get the facts about your risk and how to take precautions. Use trusted national and international resources including the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and State Departments of Health.

For people living with children

- Remember that during times of stress, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents.
- Be honest when discussing COVID-19, but do so in an age-appropriate way. If your children have concerns, help them ease their anxiety.
- Make sure you model good behavior. Children will observe adults for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.
- Help children find positive ways to express their fears about the situation. Every child has their own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity such as drawing can help this process.
- Maintain a safe and supportive environment and practice familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, especially if children are confined to home.
- Provide children with engaging activities.

For caretakers of older adults

- Provide practical and emotional support by sharing simple facts about what is going on.
- Give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary.
- Engage their family and other support networks in providing information and helping them practice prevention measures (handwashing, proper sneezing and coughing techniques, etc.).
- Be aware that older adults in isolation and/or those with cognitive decline/dementia may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated or withdrawn during this time.
- Encourage older adults with experience and special skills to help others by providing virtual peer support, reading to children over the phone, and the like.

Adapted from Miller, H. (2020, March 10). WHO gives advice on handling mental health toll from the coronavirus. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/10/who-gives-advice-on-handling-mental-health-toll-caused-by-coronavirus.html>. March 13, 2020.