Connection in a time of social distancing

COVID-19 is not the only public health threat to be aware of in the time of social distancing--loneliness is one as well. Long term effects of loneliness are similar to smoking or obesity. Feeling disconnected from others can cause people to feel depressed, susceptible to colds, develop heart disease, and contributes to shortened life expectancy. Keeping distance from other people, especially in times of stress or uncertainty, can feel deeply isolating and unhealthy.

How to cultivate social wellness while avoiding infection:

Use of digital platforms:

Video chat allows us to experience nonverbal aspects of communication like facial cues and body language. Share a meal over the screen, host a remote book club meeting or discuss your “walk” through of the many online museum tours you and a loved one agree to take “together”. If this option isn’t available, text, email or use social media to connect. Be mindful of media overconsumption; particularly with fatality counts or other difficult news.

Maintain a schedule, develop rituals:

Feel the warmth of a hot mug of coffee in your hands. Sip slowly while you check in with colleagues or friends at the start of the day. Perhaps plan for a daily bike ride, or to walk your dog at 8am, 1pm and 5pm daily. Wave to others outdoors from at least 6ft apart. Marvel in the blooming flowers and trees as spring is upon us, and share those observations with others, or in a journal.

Deepen or broaden existing or new relationships:

Reach out to connect—ask after others and share how you are thinking and feeling—this is “active” engagement. Though passive “scrolling” through social media is easy enough, we reap real benefit from sharing our experiences with others. A bit of sharing of our daily struggles and frustrations can help us feel genuinely connected; vulnerability is honesty. Be gentle with folks who are struggling — yourself and others too. Nerves may get frayed or anxiety may mount, but these are dynamic experiences, and you won’t always feel upset or frustrated. Reach out for support, and don’t forget to offer apologize when necessary. We are all in this together.

Set goals:

COVID-19 may contribute to feelings of social isolation, fear, and uncertainty. We can cope with these feelings by focusing on our immediate tasks and by reminding ourselves that worrying about conditions out of our control is counterproductive and leads to additional anxiety and stress. Commit to those longstanding aspirations! Maybe you’ll finally learn how to dance the Macarena, or tackle that book collecting dust on your nightstand. This time can prove to be a period where we can reset our priorities and do things we “haven’t gotten around to”, given the hectic pace of the world.

Reframe and rethink your relationship to solitude:

Identify the opportunity to make warmth and meaning, experience joy, and practice gratitude; even while uncertainty lingers outside our doors. We can control our internal experiences. Find solace in simplicity—focus on your breath work, cook a nourishing meal or bake a special treat. Open up a photo album—digital or a bound book, and laugh while revisiting adventures of the past, and snapshots of younger versions of yourself, family and friends.

Human connection promotes wellness and counters stress and uncertainty:

Remember that physically distancing is an act of love, of community, and connection. This pro social act, collectively, will protect many. Hope is contagious. We WILL get through this. Together.

For more information or to speak with a clinician: CGSUPRT offers employees and family members confidential, free, and immediate help, which is as easy as making a phone call. Callers can ask to speak to a licensed professional clinician, who can safely and remotely conduct telephone sessions. Furthermore, the CGSUPRT website has webinars available that address coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety reactions. For assistance call 1-855-CGSUPRT (855-247-8778) or [www.CGSUPRT.com](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.CGSUPRT.com&d=DwMFaQ&c=0NKfg44GVknAU-XkWXjNxQ&r=O2fV2sYL0MYyW909kV8Kd_zKSSCKVqvUElHgyM4MF7E&m=CpgmVlts-e4GynSoxkrmAFr2aCf4B3y2aweDwsNIsPM&s=U2bCJSw_pBdtsrUvYVTZbgkyjSS8yy3QXj3zf62Eq04&e=).

Confidential help is also available through the Disaster Distress Helpline at 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 800-273-8255 or [https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__suicidepreventionlifeline.org_&d=DwMFaQ&c=0NKfg44GVknAU-XkWXjNxQ&r=O2fV2sYL0MYyW909kV8Kd_zKSSCKVqvUElHgyM4MF7E&m=CpgmVlts-e4GynSoxkrmAFr2aCf4B3y2aweDwsNIsPM&s=LC-6aksh8WhHQgoJyZUFx0t6iEyi_SliyjRz7dF6MJw&e=). ***If you feel as if you may harm yourself or others, call 911 immediately!***