

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Preventing and Overcoming Loneliness

TIP SHEET



Loneliness is a painful, negative feeling that arises within a person, when their emotional needs are unmet by their social relationships.

Even in the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) circumstances however, there are strategies you can use to help prevent loneliness.

About loneliness

Loneliness can happen even when someone is surrounded by others but not getting the kind of company, connections and support that they need.

Many people perceive loneliness as just a social issue, but it also has an impact on overall wellbeing, and physical and mental health. If a person feels that they don't have meaningful relationships or enough social contact, it can lead to anxiety and worry, and a sense of being alone and unsupported in the world.

With the current government requirement for social distancing and directive to work remotely where possible, people have been reporting increased social isolation and loneliness. While these requirements are limiting opportunities for face-to-face socialising, the following tips can help you to prevent or overcome feelings of loneliness, and feel more connected.

1. Eliminate negative thoughts and beliefs

Loneliness can be the result of thinking distortions. It's therefore important to identify negative thoughts about yourself and your circumstances that can lead to self-blame and feelings of inadequacy, especially during this time of social isolation. Don't compare your life with others, or with what your life was usually like, in the time before COVID-19, as it could make you feel disheartened. We are what we think, so it's important to think positively. Positive thinking can be empowering. Understand your thoughts and use your mind to set some personal goals.

2. Recognise your mood

Recognise when your mood is low and pay attention to it. It's normal to feel strong emotions as a result of or in the current COVID-19 situation. You may feel grief or loss from changes to your everyday freedom or lifestyle, or as a result of job changes, or business and financial losses.

It's important to be aware of your anxieties about survival, fears about the virus, and worries about your health and the health of people around you, as well as concerns about how you will get by. If you experience low moods, it can inadvertently result in you withdrawing from others, which can then increase your isolation and loneliness. If the sad and anxious feelings you're experiencing persist or increase, it's important to get professional help.

Recognise the difference between being alone and being lonely. While some people can feel lonely even when with others or in a crowd, others are content with their own company. Even with the current social distancing and self-isolation practices, you're not on your own and staying in contact with people is important. "We're all in this together" is a phrase that's being used globally, to help us all feel strong and interconnected.

3. Keep in contact

Try to increase the contact you have with family, friends and professional colleagues on the telephone or with video calls. Just as it's important to stay physically active, it's important to keep up activities that are good for your mental health. For example, you could have a virtual coffee date, dinner party or play games online with friends, listen to podcasts, video-call family members, send text messages to family or friends or even post letters to people within your social network. While still maintaining social distancing, talk to your neighbours, either across the fence, driveway or street. Check that they're managing okay, particularly if they're elderly, live alone or are more likely to experience isolation due to their circumstances.

4. Accept the current circumstances but remember what you can control

Think about what's in your control and take charge of that. While the changes in your routine may bring about feelings of confusion, apathy or anxiety, remember that other people are in similar situations. Knowing that you are not alone can help to provide a sense of normalcy and the ability to make meaning of what's happening. You can also plan and manage those things that are within your control, such as what you eat and drink, your physical activity and level of engagement with others.

5. Recognise what makes you happy and practise good self-care

Practise good self-care and protect your mental health by managing how much news and media you consume, and only accessing reputable news sources (be wary of random social media posts).

Spend this increased time during COVID-19 doing things that you enjoy and investing in self-care. It's a good opportunity to learn more about yourself, and to go on an inner journey to explore how you feel and think.

Plan a variety of activities to do on your own, or with others virtually/online. Perhaps you've been wanting to take up a new hobby, or break unhealthy habits and form new positive ones. You could listen to music, watch movies, read a good book, start a journal or do some writing, try a new recipe, or practise mindfulness. Other self-care actions you

could take include getting enough sleep, maintaining a healthy diet, exercising, setting a new goal, decluttering your home and other creative pursuits.

6. Think of the positive things

Think of some advantages of the current situation and social distancing, such as increased time alone which allows for self-reflection and strengthening of your relationships, even if this isn't through face-to-face contact. It's important to focus on the important things in life.

Einstein said that, "adversity introduces a man to himself". Therefore, use the COVID-19 period to your advantage and "introduce you to yourself", by understanding yourself better, exploring how you think and feel, growing your personal strengths, practising self-discipline, and valuing your relationships – with yourself, as well as with your family, friends and colleagues.

Remember that the current situation will pass, and that researchers around the world are working on a vaccine for COVID-19.

If you feel that things are too difficult to manage on your own, or you would like support, reach out to a family member, friend or other acquaintance.

For professional assistance, contact your doctor, or one of the professional counselling and support services below. All these services are being provided safely and in line with official health advice during COVID-19, through telephone or video appointments, or via online chat.

Need support?

Relationships Australia Victoria has more than 70 years' experience supporting Victorians. We're still providing counselling and other services during COVID-19, including through telephone and video appointments. Contact us for more information.

To access all our available tip sheet resources, visit www.rav.org.au/COVID19-Resources

24/7 crisis support services:

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800