

HOW TO PREVENT LONELINESS IN A TIME OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING

CONNECTING DAILY



FACE-TO-FACE FROM AFAR



REACH OUT

“Isolation is the right response to the coronavirus pandemic; we however, need the exact opposite in response to the loneliness epidemic.”

PEOPLE ARE GETTING REALLY CREATIVE ABOUT, BEING TOGETHER WHILE APART



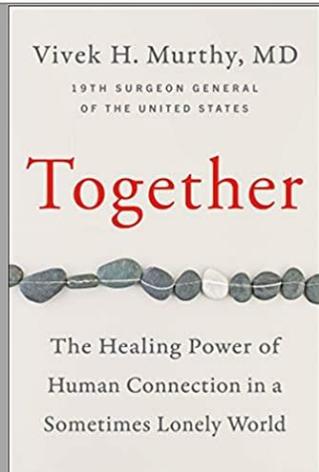
Even without the coronavirus keeping us apart, the majority of the population was already suffering from loneliness and poor social health.

Currently, with increasing numbers of people secluded because of quarantine and social distancing, COVID-19 is not the only community health risk we should be concerned about—loneliness is one as well.

“Although isolation is the right response to the coronavirus pandemic, we need the exact opposite in response to the loneliness epidemic... So how can you cultivate your social well-being while avoiding infection?”

Scrolling through social media may have contributed to the prevalence of loneliness among Gen Zers and millennials; however, use of technology in itself is not the problem. Research findings from studies at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health demonstrate that *how* social media is used matter more than *how much* it is used. The crucial issue is to develop digital practices that support meaningful interpersonal connections—particularly now when in-person interactions with friends are discouraged.

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Humans are social creatures: in this simple and clear statement lies both the problem and the solution to the crisis of loneliness. In his cutting-edge book, the 19th Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy discusses loneliness as a significant public health concern: a fundamental cause and contributor to many of the extensive epidemics of the world today from alcohol and drug addiction to depression, anxiety, and even violence. Loneliness, he argues, is affecting not only our physical and mental health but also our ability to achieve, perform, and succeed, as well as our sense of division in society.

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIALLY HEALTHY WAYS AS A WAY TO CONNECT WHILE APART

Face-to-face from afar: The next best thing to in-person interaction is video chat, because communication is 80% non-verbal; facial expression, body language, posture, and other nonverbal forms of communication are important for connection. When possible, attempt to use video over texting, messaging or calling. Challenge yourself to do what you would normally do with others via video. For example, try having a digital dinner with someone, have a virtual happy hour with friends, or a remote book club meeting with others.

One-minute kindness: Getting lots of likes on a social media post may give you a passing hit of dopamine, but receiving a direct message or e-mail with a sincere compliment or expression of appreciation is more personal and longer lasting—without necessarily taking much more time. Instead of pressing “like” on a Facebook post, write a few kind words to someone. Most people could benefit from kindness and thoughtfulness given the stress and uncertainty we are living with at this time.

Cultivate your community: The basis of connection is having common interests and/or values. Multiple online communities share your goals, passion, or ideals. Use these networks to engage around what matters most to you.

Deepen or broaden: Fundamentally, there are two ways to overcome loneliness: cultivate your current relationships or form new ones. Reflect on your social health/needs and take one digital action to deepen it—such as getting in touch with a friend or family member you haven’t spoken with in a while—or to broaden it—such as reaching out to someone you’d like to get to know.

Use a tool: The following apps and social platforms were designed to optimize online interactions with loved ones: Ikaria, Cocoon, Monaru and Squad. These resources may be useful options particularly for people who like structure. You can consider using conversation prompts, such as TableTopics or The And, to spark interesting dialogue during a video call.

Reach out to someone who may be lonely. Call up your neighbors, your relatives, or your friends to check in. They will not only appreciate your gesture but it will probably help you feel a sense of connection at a time when we are to maintain physical distance.

COMMIT TO DAILY FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION BY USING SOME OF THESE SUGGESTIONS

- Schedule a skype, FaceTime, or Zoom lunch or dinner with a friend or friends.
- Go for a bike ride with a neighbor.
- Go for a walk with a friend, each on a different side of the street.
- Watch a movie “together” even when you are physically distant.
- Cook and eat with a relative or friend.
- Connect with a previous teacher or mentor.
- Call someone you haven’t talk with in a while.
- Read an article for fun or for a class and discuss it via face-to face conferencing.
- Work “together” on an art project.
- Play an interactive game with friends.
- Offer and receive virtual hugs.
- Engage in one of the Virtual Wellness Center activities

<https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/virtual/index.php>



For brief supportive services during business hours or for crisis services after hours and on weekends call (757) 221-3620 or call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255. For a life-threatening emergency, call 911.