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Loneliness during coronavirus

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The Mental Health Foundation is part of the national mental health response during the coronavirus outbreak. Government advice designed to keep us safe is under constant review and will be different depending on where you live: more details and up to date information here.

One of the feelings millions of us are experiencing during the current coronavirus pandemic is loneliness. In our combined efforts to stay safe and save lives, our usual ways of seeing family, friends or just familiar faces have been put on pause.

How lonely are UK adults feeling?

According to a survey* of UK adults which took place during lockdown (2 – 3 April), one in four (24%) said they had feelings of loneliness in the "previous two weeks". When the same question was asked shortly before lockdown, just one in ten people (10%) said they had these feelings. In a matter of weeks, social distancing left millions more people in the UK feeling isolated.

Young people aged 18 to 24 were most likely* to experience loneliness since the lockdown began. Before lockdown, one in six (16%) said they felt lonely. Since lockdown, young people are almost three times more likely to have experienced loneliness, with almost half (44%) feeling this way.

How does loneliness affect our mental health?

Many of us feel lonely from time to time and these short-term feelings shouldn't harm our mental health. However, the longer the pandemic goes on for, the more these feelings become long-term.

Long-term loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and increased stress. The impact of long-term loneliness on mental health can be very hard to manage.

What can we do to prevent loneliness?

The government is telling us to stay at home and only go outside for food, health reasons or essential work, to stay two metres (six feet) away from other people and wash our hands as soon as we get home.

That means we need to adapt how we connect with people and find new ways to stay in touch during this time. Now, more than ever, is the time to keep up those strong social networks that act like a buffer against poor mental health.

Staying in touch via video calls, Whatsapp or just regular phone calls, is vital. Keep up your routines where possible – for example if you play cards with your friends on a weeknight, try keeping this in the diary and playing a game on a video call instead. Or potentially join one of the many online quizzes hosted on Facebook or Youtube, playing as a team.

If you're not tech savvy, regular phone calls, messages or even writing letters are lovely ways to show someone that you're thinking of them.

We have written a guide to [nurturing relationships during Coronavirus](#) with lots of different ideas for keeping in touch.

Helping others who might be experiencing loneliness

Three in four of the overall population, and about half of the younger population, have not been experiencing loneliness during lockdown according to the survey.[*] This shows great resilience during this time of isolation and shows that many of us are adapting our ways of keeping in contact with people. Doing good is good for our mental health, so now could a good opportunity to help someone else who might be feeling lonely.

One idea is to get in touch with someone who lives alone or might not have many relatives or close connections to check in on them. A message or a phone call could make a big difference to someone who hasn't heard from anyone in a while.

If it's a neighbour, you could even share something you've baked with them - at a safe distance! If you know someone who struggles with technology, now could be a good time to talk them through setting up something like Skype or Zoom at home. This could make a huge difference to their social interactions in future.

We've come up with some more ideas for random acts of kindness during the Coronavirus outbreak.

It's not just you

Remember, no one is exempt from feeling lonely at times. All of us, at some point or other during this coronavirus pandemic, will feel cut off from our loved ones. However, some of us will have greater access to technology than others, or more social connections.

By caring for each other, checking in on people who are more isolated, or even volunteering for a helpline, we can help prevent a loneliness epidemic.

What to do if you are feeling lonely

- Try calling a friend, family member, health professional or counsellor to talk about your feelings.
- You could also contact Samaritans, call: 116 123 or email: jo@samaritans.org if you need someone to talk to.
- Join an online group or class that focuses on something you enjoy – that could be anything from an online exercise class, book club etc.
- Consider going for short walks in public places (while keeping a two metre distance).

This is a challenging and sometimes lonely time, but it will pass. There will be lots of hugs, shared pots of tea, parties and celebrations in the future. For now, let's be as kind as possible to ourselves and others.

For more ways of looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak check out our Coronavirus advice hub.

The Mental Health Foundation is committed to bringing readers reliable and relevant information. All of our pages are written and regularly reviewed by our

mental health experts, in line with official advice on the coronavirus outbreak.

We need your support to keep providing vital information during this time.

Please consider making a donation today

Public Health England have developed explicit guidance on mental health in the crisis. If you want to develop a personalised plan for supporting your mental health you can also visit the PHE _Every Mind Matters site_, developed in collaboration with the Mental Health Foundation.

If you need to talk confidentially you can call Samaritans on 116 123 at any time. We also have a resource on _how to get help for your mental health_.

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Do you need urgent help?

If your mental or emotional state quickly gets worse, or you're worried about someone you know - **help is available**.

You're not alone; talk to someone you trust. Sharing a problem is often the first step to recovery.

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