

▶▶ Overcoming the Isolation of Physical Distancing



While recommendations for maintaining social distance and at-home isolation can keep us from becoming infected or infecting others, the subsequent loneliness can lead to anxiety, fear, anger and depression. Remember that “social distancing” is about maintaining physical space from others to avoid infection; it is not about limiting social interaction. Here are some suggestions for staying connected in these COVID-19 times:

Face-to-face but not in the same place:

The next best thing to in-person interactions are video chats, because facial cues, body language and other nonverbal forms of communication are important for bonding. When possible, opt for video over messaging or calling, and experiment or deviate from what you would normally do with others. For example, try having a digital dinner with someone you met on a dating app, a virtual happy hour with friends or a remote book club meeting.

One-minute kindness:

Getting lots of likes on a social media post may give you a fleeting hit of dopamine, but receiving a direct message or e-mail with a genuine compliment or expression of gratitude is more personal and longer lasting—without taking much more time. When you find yourself scrolling through people’s posts, stop and send one of them a few kind words. After all, we need a little extra kindness to counter the stress and uncertainty of the coronavirus.

Cultivate your community:

The basis of connection is having something in common. Whatever your niche interest is, there is an online community of people who share your passion and can’t wait to nerd out with you about it. There are also digital support groups, such as for new parents or patients with a rare disease. Use these networks to engage around what matters most to you.

Deepen or broaden:

Fundamentally, there are two ways to overcome loneliness: nurture your existing relationships and form new ones. Reflect on your current state of social health and then take digital actions to deepen it—such as reconnecting with a friend or family member—or to broaden it. This could include reaching out to someone you’d like to get to know.

Use available resources:

Increasingly, apps and social platforms are being designed to help us optimize our online interactions with loved ones. If you do well with structure, these resources may be useful options for you. The coronavirus pandemic has reminded us that human connection can spread illness. But human connection also promotes wellness. Let’s take this opportunity to recognize the importance of relationships for our health and practice leveraging technology for social well-being.

If you are in crisis and need help, call the ACCESS Line at 1-800-854-7771. Help is available 24/7.

You should seek help IF:

- You find yourself having severe depressive thoughts due to fear and/or isolation, and you are afraid you might harm yourself.
- You are in a relationship where there is domestic violence that risks your safety and well-being and/or that of children in your home.