



## **COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**

### **LIVING ALONE DURING SHELTER IN PLACE**

**Version 2, 4/20/20**

Are you living alone while having to maintain physical distancing with the current COVID-19 guidelines in place? While some people really cherish and value this alone time, others may appreciate it to some extent but also may find themselves feeling lonely, stressed, or frustrated. How the alone time impacts you may differ based on whether you generally prefer to be alone, if you are alone because you have lost or are separated from the people you love, or if you feel distressed because you are not in a relationship and wish that you were. Loneliness is associated with mental health problems (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts) and physical illness. Loneliness and related feelings may be particularly strong for people who live on their own, as in-person human connection is critically important for so many people. A sense of individual grief and collective sorrow is a common experience right now. When these feelings are intense, they can make it challenging to manage stress, anxiety, and your emotional and physical well-being. It is important to proactively seek out existing connections and maybe new social relationships during this time, be kind to yourself and others, and take active steps to care for your mental and physical health. It is important to remember that being isolated simply means that you are not in the physical presence of others. It does not mean you have to feel lonely or not connected to other people. So, remind yourself that we are practicing physical (not social) distancing and many people are seeking out ways to connect while otherwise physically isolated. Here are some tips to help bolster your resilience as you navigate the experience of living alone while sheltering in place. Helpful resources also are included.

#### **Connect from Afar**

- Schedule time to connect regularly with others you know and follow through on these plans
  - Use high tech ways to connect with others
    - Use virtual platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Facebook Messenger or [many others](#) to have one-on-one or group chats
    - Plan digital dinners, virtual happy hour with friends, remote book clubs, or play games while chatting on [HouseParty](#)
    - Use an **app like Netflix party** to arrange a virtual group hangout where you can watch **great movies** and **TV shows** with your friends



- Use low-tech ways to connect with others
  - Call people on the phone
  - Write emails or letters
  - Text people
  - See people from a distance and connect in creative ways (e.g., talk on the phone with your neighbor while you sit outside and look at each other)
- End these interactions with virtual hugs when appropriate
- Deepen your relationships
  - Ask people how they are doing when you connect with them
  - Take time to ask others how you can be helpful or supportive to them
  - Arrange time to have in-depth or meaningful conversations with people
- Broaden your network
  - Reach out and check in on someone you've been wanting to get to know better
  - Reconnect with someone you haven't spoken to in a while
- Cultivate an online community
  - Find an online group of people who share your passions or are coping with a similar situation (e.g., [Unlonely film club](#), Good Reads' [book clubs](#))
  - Chat with someone on [Dial Up](#)
  - Join virtual events like those on [Eventbrite](#) and [other platforms](#)
- Make new connections
  - Engage in online dating if that's of interest to you – safe time to date, people have time to connect, there is less pressure
- Engage with a COVID buddy who also is living alone
  - Make a commitment to support each other during this pandemic
  - Check in with each other daily
  - Develop an action plan for what to do if you cannot reach each other or if one person becomes ill physically or emotionally overwhelmed

### **Extend Kindness and Support**

- Practice [self-compassion](#)
  - Strive to accept your difficult feelings as they occur and remind yourself that they come and go.
- Show compassion and appreciation to others
  - Send messages of gratitude to the people in your life.
- Engage in other care
  - Learn about volunteer activities
    - Ask about opportunities to volunteer or help through your job or other



- organizations
  - Check out online volunteering opportunities - volunteer matching websites like [Catchafire](#) are making special efforts during this pandemic
- Give back to those at the front lines of confronting COVID (provide food, sew masks)
- Help others living alone who can't do as much as you can

### **Acknowledge, Manage, and Grow from Your Painful Feelings**

- Name and claim what you are feeling and why
- Give yourself permission to feel the way you do and know that you are not alone in your experience
- Validate emotions that make sense given the circumstances – grief for example is commonly experienced by most people during this pandemic
- Be compassionate toward yourself and do your best not to ruminate about why you are alone or to blame yourself for being alone
- Write about or share with others your personal strengths and coping abilities
- Express your feelings in a creative or tangible way
- Find ways to connect with others without being in front of them to reduce your feelings of loneliness
- Make your solitude time constructive by reflecting, creating, and engaging in meaningful endeavors

### **Engage in Consistent Self-Care and Wellness Practices**

- Create a routine – this helps with predictability, consistency, and a sense of normalcy that promotes self-care and reduces loneliness
  - Build in regular time for activities that you will look forward to, such as time with others
  - Select an activity to do, alone or with a friend online
    - Create a list of activities you want to do and those that are fun or relaxing to do
    - Consider coloring or doodling, finding recipes and making meals, watching [live streams](#) of cute animals, making playlists of your favorite music, listening to radio stations you find uplifting, and [many more](#)
  - Make time to unplug from work, hobbies or anything else on your to do list
  - Set limits on the time you spend consuming news coverage or on social media or talking about COVID
- Develop a self-care practice that includes multiple forms of self-care, such as



- regular sleep, exercise via workouts online or walks outside, meditation (e.g., [this guided meditation](#) by Tara Brach), balanced eating, etc.
- Use Apps, such as [these](#), to facilitate effective coping
  - Allow yourself to be still without the pressure of remaining constantly productive
  - Make your space as comfortable and best suited to your needs as possible
  - Capitalize on the time you have alone and make it constructive
    - Engage in projects that you have been putting off or that could bring you satisfaction and pleasure
    - Start a new hobby
      - Discover or develop interests you haven't previously had time to nurture.
      - Search [YouTube](#) or blogs to learn more about potential hobbies, such as gardening or do-it-yourself tasks.
      - Enhance your own existing skills by sharing them online with others
    - Make your outings count and be mindful of your surroundings
    - Remind yourself what is most meaningful and important to you and identify how you can engage with these values daily to increase your sense of purpose and improve your mood

### ***Helpful Resources:***

- In response to COVID-19, Emory University's Department of Psychiatry has created and continues to develop and update a series of psychological wellness guides. Find more tips for maximizing wellness and managing anxiety and stress here: <http://www.psychiatry.emory.edu/covid.response/index.html>
- The Scientific American: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-prevent-loneliness-in-a-time-of-social-distancing/>
- Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness provides COVID-19 materials and resources for staying connected while intentionally isolated: <https://www.endsocialisolation.org/covid19>
- Forbes' tips to decrease social isolation for older people during COVID-19: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/naomicahn/2020/03/18/five-tips-to-decrease-social-isolation-for-older-people-during-covid-19/#42332a734095>
- Yale School of Medicine: <https://www.yalemedicine.org/stories/life-at-home-covid-19-outbreak/>
- Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health: <https://www.jhsph.edu/covid-19/articles/how-to-prevent-social-isolation-from-making-loneliness-worse.html>
- The Buffalo News: <https://buffalonews.com/2020/04/03/you-may-live-alone-during->



- [covid-19-but-need-not-feel-isolated/](#)
- Pulse: <http://www.pulse.lk/everythingelse/coping-mechanisms-for-people-living-alone-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
  - Huffington Post: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cope-with-loneliness-social-distancing-live-alone\\_|\\_5e84c3adc5b6871702a88642?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAANFHN-hXgLNels22dAc1carR4npb9tfoiBkuwmDXSnlcK\\_ug1zKt5EW722FMwfz6NSITwx-HWtuhxuSgCAhTkbsevnbcPAYmoSTx\\_LDAub8fZ4q7EjGbRrLhB-Rw5UO37bzx-hpCbEd6eTvQjvNCEwVWMQJi3QrFy38cmhMASjq2j](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cope-with-loneliness-social-distancing-live-alone_|_5e84c3adc5b6871702a88642?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANFHN-hXgLNels22dAc1carR4npb9tfoiBkuwmDXSnlcK_ug1zKt5EW722FMwfz6NSITwx-HWtuhxuSgCAhTkbsevnbcPAYmoSTx_LDAub8fZ4q7EjGbRrLhB-Rw5UO37bzx-hpCbEd6eTvQjvNCEwVWMQJi3QrFy38cmhMASjq2j)
  - Vancouver Courier: <https://www.vancourier.com/news/live-alone-tips-on-how-to-manage-during-covid-19-pandemic-1.24102196>
  - Artnet news reports on an app that enables strangers in quarantine all over the world to talk to each other: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artists-quarantine-chat-1800033>
  - 7News: <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/coronavirus-quarantine-how-to-be-alone-not-lonely-during-covid-19-self-isolation-c-950072>
  - Very Well Mind: <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-coronavirus-4799661#practice-self-compassion>
  - Mother Jones: [https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2020/03/social-distancing-keith-lamar-solitary-confinement-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR1cejO2Z8VH-d\\_N2QZ23xS1GWB5-BIpHOgdt8cCReQpLjIN5Ix2\\_79f2A](https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2020/03/social-distancing-keith-lamar-solitary-confinement-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR1cejO2Z8VH-d_N2QZ23xS1GWB5-BIpHOgdt8cCReQpLjIN5Ix2_79f2A)
  - Scott Berinato – The discomfort you're feeling is grief: <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>