

HOW TO COPE WITH SOCIAL ISOLATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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Normal Reactions:

- It is normal to:
 - feel anxiety for self, loved ones when unable to reach out.
 - feel that others are “watching you” or “judging you,” when you sneeze or cough.
 - project your mind into the future with worry (this is different from catastrophizing).
 - be insecure about getting things you need (also different from catastrophizing).
 - catastrophize, but we need to check these thoughts with “most likely” scenarios.
 - feel anger or frustration about others’ actions or in-actions.
 - feel alone sometimes, when isolated or even in a large family.
 - feel bored at times, even when there is so much to do!
 - want to escape at times, whether with a book, or TV.
 - want to numb your feelings. It is essential to avoid alcohol and drugs.

What is an “Abnormal Reaction” to Isolation:

- Thoughts you would rather be dead.
- Thoughts others would be better off if you were dead.
- You find you are unable to function/ cannot care for yourself.
- When you are re-triggered by former traumas you:
 - cannot sleep.
 - cannot eat.
 - have nightmares.
 - re-experience trauma.
 - cannot function as normal.
- When you continue to have **depressive symptoms** that persist for two weeks or more with:
 - feeling helpless.
 - feeling hopeless.
 - feeling worthless.accompanied by:
 - poor (or too much) sleep.
 - poor (or too much) appetite.
 - inability to feel pleasure.
 - poor energy.
 - difficulty with concentration.
 - feeling either too revved up or too slowed down.
- When your **anxiety** affects your ability to function in day-to-day life making you feel/have:

- restless, keyed up or on edge.
- easily fatigued.
- difficulty concentrating.
- mind going blank.
- irritable.
- muscle tension.
- sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, early wakening or unsatisfying sleep)
- If you are **losing touch with reality**:
 - hearing or seeing things that are not there.
 - getting paranoid that people are going to hurt you or your family, plotting and planning against you.
- Having **panic attacks**: rapid events 5-15 minutes in onset with rapid decline, with the following symptoms that may wake you out of sleep or “come from nowhere.” These may leave you unable to get daily activities done because you are afraid of having another panic attack.
 - chest pain.
 - shortness of breath.
 - derealization.
 - feel like you are going crazy or going to die.
 - chills or sweating.
 - trembling.
 - feeling like you are out of your own body.
- Having **obsessive or unwanted thoughts** accompanied by **compulsive** physical or mental **rituals** that intrude in your life and take up significant time, or affect your ability to function normally. Obsessions and rituals can include:
 - fear of contamination.
 - needing order or symmetry.
 - believing something horrific is going to happen to someone.
 - having aggressive or horrific thoughts about harming yourself or others.
 - having unwanted thoughts about sexual or religious subjects.
 - non-stop hand washing.
 - checking light switches.
 - saying prayers or doing things “just right.”
- Behavioral **eating problems**:
 - eating too little (severely restricting food intake).
 - bingeing (out of control eating of an excessive number of calories in one sitting).
 - purging or vomiting or using laxatives to control your weight.
- If you feel **out of control showing** signs of **mania such as**:
 - needing little to no sleep and still feeling OK.
 - feeling “on top of the world” and grandiose.
 - being highly irritable.
 - having racing thoughts.
 - being unable to stop talking.
 - being engaged in uncharacteristically risky or foolish behavior.

Helpful Behaviors During Social Isolation

Understanding the Purpose of Social Isolation:

- To maintain your own health.
- You are protecting others if you get ill and potentially saving someone else's life.

First, Do the Basics:

- Set a routine
 - set a regular time to wake and sleep (7-9 hours per day).
 - have a daily to do list.
 - try to keep to your schedule.
- Eat three meals daily and have healthy snacks (include fruit, vegetables and protein).
- Hydrate! Water is best.
- Exercise: you can do this in doors! Enjoy an exercise/dance class online.
- Get groceries delivered: from online vendors/supermarkets that deliver.
- Find pharmacies that deliver or mail medications; or have drive-through windows.
- When you can't get your needs met, reach out to state and local officials for ways to get services.
- If you go to the doctor, make sure you get handouts or clear instructions.
- Local religious organizations have services online.
- When exposing yourself to TV, choose only one reputable source to watch.
- Know your rights with respect to the Family Medical Leave Act, and contact the Department of Labor 1-866-487-2365.
 - You have the right to 12 weeks unpaid leave to care for family members or if you have a serious medical condition.
- If you are in a 12-step program, there are AA and NA meetings online.
 - If you do relapse, get back on track NOW!
- Continue regular online therapy with your mental health care professional.
- Make sure to take your medications as prescribed; do not ration or increase your dose.
- Reach out to family and friends on social media BEFORE your needs are too great.
- Continue regular 20-second hand washing.
- Pace yourself! Do a fun activity after a difficult task.
- Practice self-compassion:
 - Practice talking to yourself as your own best friend.
 - Allow yourself to make mistakes, we all do!
 - Be realistic about what you can accomplish.
 - Give yourself credit for getting thru the crisis.
 - Maintain hope!

Fun Activities During Social Isolation

Reaching Inside: Solitary Activities

- Write a list of goals in your life you want to work on.
- Write your own short stories, poetry or fan fiction (crafting a new episode your favorite show).
- Write your own diary.
- Write or record your memoir.
- Read a story out loud and act out the parts.
- Write letters to friends and family.
- Organize a photo album.
- Watch movies, TV or videos.
- Do your therapy homework.
- Look for an on-line job.
- Knit/crochet/sew.
- Learn something new: on-line classes/ YouTube.
- Keep yourself well groomed.
- Care for and love your pets.
- Paint or do a craft/origami/calligraphy/draw (check online classes).
- Cook/try new recipes.
- Practice gratitude/ mindfulness/ loving kindness.
- Clean closets/organize your house.
- Rearrange the furniture in your room/apartment/house.
- Do puzzles/ Lego.
- Listen to music/ make a playlist.
- Listen to podcasts/audio books.
- Read a good book.
- Re-invent your exercise routine, or start one (videos, yoga, walk but keep social distance).

Reaching Out

- Volunteer: call seniors, people who are ill or live alone (see references for government and NAMI contacts for opportunities).
 - Encourage your children and other family members to volunteer.
- Meditation groups online: 10% Happier, Head Space, Calm etc.
- Bond with your family:
 - have the conversations you always intended with your loved ones.
 - play with your family.
- Start a blog or journal with your family members or community.
- Mobilize your community to contribute, ex. making face-masks.
- Play board or card games with family members.
- Write a family play and share it with others.

Holidays and Social Isolation

- Organize a holiday meal using social media with friends and family.
 - Send out paper or virtual invitations to family and friends.
 - Enjoy the cooking process together online.
 - Conduct a birthday party or Passover Seder or Easter Dinner or other important religious or social event online.

Places to call for help:

National Suicide Prevention Hot line: 1-800-273-HELP

Treatment Locator: 1-800-662-HELP

Disaster Distress Helpline: 1800-846-8517

National Alliance for Mental Illness: NAMI.org

COVID-19 Volunteer Opportunities: [Coronavirus.health.ny.gov](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov)

REMEMBER

- **We are all in this together.**
- **You are not alone.**
- **This crisis will pass!**