

How to Cope with Loneliness and Social Isolation in Today's World

Loneliness and social isolation are becoming a behavioral epidemic, resulting in increased depression, anxiety, and suicide rates. I've experienced loneliness at times and know how brutal it can be. I've also witnessed first-hand how emotionally and mentally destructive it can be to my family, friends, and peers. We need connection, we need community, we need each other.

Today, it's challenging to have a great social life. **This was true even before Covid-19 became an issue.**

In the not-so-distant past, it used to be so boring to stay at home during the evenings and the weekends that people always looked for an excuse to get out of the house. But now, between streaming services, the internet, smartphones, and video games, it's much easier to find an excuse to stay home.

Covid-19 has only made the situation even more challenging. Now, there is a legitimate reason to avoid others.

While a few select people seem to thrive with minimal human contact, **most people need to spend time with others to stay emotionally healthy and happy.**

Luckily, there are still things you can do to help maintain your emotional health, even when your time with others is reduced. The key is to be **intentional.**

Learn how to ease the discomfort of loneliness and social isolation with

these tips:

1. **Be productive.** Just because you might be spending a lot of time alone doesn't mean you just have to sit there and be miserable. **Everyone feels better when they're being productive.** Some productive activities include:
 - Paint the living room.
 - Volunteer to help others.
 - Take a class online.
 - Rearrange the pantry.
 - Take the car in to have the tires rotated.
 - Take the dog for a walk.
 - Read a book.
 - And many more
2. **Safely connect with others.** Use your imagination and find a way to connect with people while making your health a priority.
 - **Use Skype, Zoom, Facetime, and other options for talking "face-to-face."**
 - Chat online via forums.
 - Sit outside by a fire in the fresh air and have a conversation with a friend.
 - Go to church or attend a sporting event.
 - Join a class and learn something new with others.
 - Play golf or tennis.
 - Volunteer at a local charity. Recently, my wife and I volunteered at a food pantry to take the focus off of ourselves and place it on others.
3. **View beautiful things.** What makes something attractive? It makes you feel a certain way when you look at it. With your smartphone or computer, you can view just about anything in the world. Spend some time looking at beautiful things each day, and you'll feel great.
 - Look at old photographs.
 - Go to a museum.
 - Find the most perfect tree in the park and really

look at it.

4. **Take up a solo hobby.** There are plenty of hobbies you can do by yourself. Paint, play chess online, hike, knit, write, ride a bike, or train your dog. **A hobby is something you choose to do because it brings you pleasure.**
5. **Get a pet.** If you don't have a pet, consider getting one. You can have a more meaningful relationship with the right pet than you can have with 99% of the people in the world. What type of animal interests you? My dog, Bonnie, is a great companion at times when no one else is around.
6. **Maintain a high level of self-care.** Loneliness and social isolation often lead to poor self-care. **It's important to continue taking good care of yourself** even if you're spending a lot of time alone. For example, a shower isn't something that you do just for others. It's also something that you do for yourself.
7. **Be creative.** Most people find they are more creative when they have time to themselves. Now is an ideal time to take advantage of your solitude. Heck, I even wrote a book during the pandemic. Let your creative juices flow!
 - What ideas do you have?
 - What do you want to create?
 - What do you want to experiment with?

Having a lot of free time alone doesn't have to be a bad thing. **There is a lot you can do to ease the discomfort of loneliness and social isolation.** Technology makes it relatively easy to connect with others, even if physical proximity is impossible. Feeling productive can also ease the pain of being alone.

Instead of focusing on this great challenge, try to take advantage of its unique possibilities. You can learn more

about yourself and try out a few hobbies. You're free to explore your interests without interference from others.

Just think – by developing other interests, when the time comes when you can reconnect socially, you'll have a variety of new things to talk about.

If you are a Christian, I encourage you to trust God's promise, "Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 40:10 ESV) God said that he will never leave you or forsake you. When I was at rock bottom in some of my darkest moments, I trusted God, sensed his presence, and knew that he was with me. I hope you will trust God's promise.

Lastly, if you are struggling with depression, anxiety, or experiencing suicidal thoughts, talk to someone NOW! You've got to tell somebody. You're not alone. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to get help (available 24 hours): 1-800-273-8255. Website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

All my best,

Preston