

How to Cope with Social Isolation during the Coronavirus Outbreak

These are uncertain and pressing times. The emergence of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has caused wide spread anxiety and concern for the health of others and ourselves. In order to manage the spread of this virus the government has urged us to engage in social distancing and social isolation. This is a necessity under the current global circumstances, which is going to be an understandable strain and sacrifice for us all. Below are a few tips to help us cope with social isolation in order to preserve our mental and physical health.

1. Connecting with others

It is very important to try and stay connected with others even though we need to be physically distant at present. This will include making phone calls and making use of technology and apps such as facebook, whatsapp, and zoom, amongst many others. This will help us to stay connected with significant others and to help reduce feelings of loneliness.

2. Plan structure in your day

Even though many will have to work and study at home during this public health crisis it is important to still maintain a routine as much as possible. For example, waking up at a similar time each day, setting time for work/rest, and staying in touch (virtually) with colleagues and friends. It is also vital to maintain your sleep-wake cycle so you work and rest in the day time and you sleep during the night time. It is essential to maintain this cycle as much as possible in order maintain your health and wellbeing.

3. Physical Exercise

Due to the limits imposed on all of us, physical exercise will need to be adapted at the current time. If you can, it is advised to exercise as much as you can at home by walking up and down the stairs, doing exercise videos, and lifting weights. We have been advised to limit outdoor exercise to one

walk, run, or cycle a day. When outside it is important to maintain at least 2 meters distance from others, while exercising.

4. Connect with nature

Whilst social isolating and limiting one's activities outside of the home, it is still important to connect with nature whenever possible. For example, if you are able to leave the home, take time to notice greenery, trees, and the colours of flowers. If you are unable to leave the home use any garden space you have or sit by the window to feel the breeze and the sunshine on your skin. Spending time with pets is yet another way of connecting with nature and helping us to feel close to others. Connecting with nature can have a calming effect on the body by reducing stress levels and by helping us to cope during this period of social isolation.

5. Mental Stimulation

Keeping mentally stimulated and occupied whilst staying at home will be essential for maintaining our mental health and wellbeing. This can involve studying, reading, working, playing games, and trying something new e.g. making a new recipe, finding new music you like, learning a new language or musical instrument. You can even try new tasks together like puzzles, solving riddles, learning trivia, or watching new TV programs/films. There is a risk of boredom during periods of social isolation so it is vital to try and keep some variety and interest during this time.

6. Find a 'new normal' for now

Routine as we knew it will no doubt be disrupted during this outbreak. It is therefore important to find a 'new normal' by creating a routine and structure in your day and week during this period of social isolation. This could involve watching films, listening to music, playing card/board games, spending time with significant others in the home but also having some time for yourself to recharge your batteries whenever possible.

7. Limit news

During such times of uncertainty and anxiety it is important to keep well informed about the latest government guidelines, which can change day by day. Seek information from reputable sources such as government and NHS websites (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>;

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>) in order to keep up to date with how best to keep safe during this outbreak and what to do should you or anyone you know develops symptoms. Being informed will help you to feel more confident that you are doing everything you can to keep yourself and others safe. However, it is also important not to spend the majority of your day being preoccupied by the news so limit your use to no more than half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening to check for latest updates.

8. Tolerating uncertainty

We are going to feel a number of wide ranging emotions during this pandemic, including shock, disbelief, anxiety, sadness, and anger. It is entirely normal to feel these emotions of varying intensity especially during times of great uncertainty. What we know about emotions is that they come and go and it is important to be aware of them and to notice how we cope with them. Coping with emotions by trying to avoid (through alcohol/substances) or push them away only makes them more likely to come back stronger. It is therefore important to be in touch with our emotions and to let them fade away naturally, as they rarely if ever, stay at the same intensity for prolonged periods of time. When there is a problem that is causing us anxiety that we can solve we are encouraged to problem solve that situation to the best of our ability. Unfortunately, during an outbreak like this, we are likely to have feelings of helplessness and powerless as this is a situation that is not fully in our control. However, we can exert control to some extent by adhering to the government guidelines of maintaining hand hygiene, social distancing, social isolation, and by limiting the number of times you leave your home.

9. Practicing kindness

These are unprecedented and pressing times that we are all going through. It is paramount that despite this global event we continue to show the kindness and courtesy to others that we would be grateful to receive ourselves. As we are all likely to feel moments of stress during this pandemic, small acts and gestures of kindness will be appreciated more than ever. Please be considerate and thoughtful, and this can be shown by asking others how they are, making a cup of tea for a loved one, delivering a package of food/medication, and maintaining appropriate distancing.

10. Appreciation

Despite these challenging times it is important to have appreciation for what we have and for whom we have in our lives. Global events like these can help put things into perspective for us, such as still having loved ones around us, supportive colleagues, and nice neighbours. This is a time for our communities to pull together and to look out for each other and finding things to be appreciative and grateful for will help us get through this crisis together.

11. Hope & Optimism

It may feel like the life we knew and had prior to this outbreak is a distant memory as the norms for shopping, working, and connecting with others have dramatically changed in a short period of time. We are all adjusting and adapting to this new way of life and hope that we can return to what was once normal. It is important to keep positive and hopeful and to remember that this moment we are experiencing now is temporary and with time, will pass. We hope that you and the ones you love can keep safe during this pressing time and should you or someone you care about becomes unwell, the NHS is doing everything they can to get people well. And that it is our collective duty to halt the spread of this virus so we can return to normality in the not too distant future.