

5 Tips To Stay Connected When Isolation Is Expected

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School has been cancelled and is being moved on-line and you have unexpectedly found yourself stuck inside or still in your parent's house. Additionally, even if you are feeling physically well, you need to engage in social distancing and isolating at home as much as you can to help reduce the spread of the Coronavirus. This can create a lot of loneliness and difficult feelings associated with being disconnected from others. It can impact your physical and mental health so it's important to try to stay connected while staying safe.

Here are some things to keep in mind to reduce loneliness and social isolation:

1. Call people.



Image: Tumblr Timebombtown

You know that glowy computer screen you carry around with you all day, everyday? It's a phone! Phones are used to call and talk to people that you are not physically near. I'm talking about actually calling and talking. Texting, Snapchat and Instagram DMs are all great ways to keep in touch, but will not do what calling can do.

Call your friends and family! Channel your inner teenager from the 1980s and spend some time talking on the phone about nothing and everything with the people you care about.

2. Take a walk.

You can socially distance on a nice lovely walk outside. In Mankato there are a ton of paths and walks through nature that you can go on without breaking the rules for social distancing and self-isolation. Check them out here:

<https://www.mankatomn.gov/city-services-a-z/city-services-n-z/parks/trails>

As human beings we are not supposed to spend all of our time inside. We need sunshine and fresh air – so go get some! A 20-minute walk outside will help boost your mood and help you feel less trapped inside and isolated.

3. Listen to music, find something funny, learn something new – and then share it with someone!

With a 3-week long spring break, you have plenty of time (hopefully) to find new music, a new show, a hilarious meme, or a new hobby that brings you joy and lifts your mood. Ask around for recommendations and share your own.

Perhaps, like me, you have a ukulele that someone bought you years ago that you played for 2 months and then forgot about – well it is time to tune it up and learn some new songs. There are a ton of free beginner videos on Youtube to learn things like the ukulele, crocheting, baking bread, and so many other skills that can help you feel productive during this time. You can use these skills to make things for others to give them now or in the future when we no longer need to engage in social distancing.



The author and her neglected ukulele

4. Reach out to someone who may be more at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

If you are feeling lonely and disconnected, other people are too. If you struggle with reaching out, know that other people do too. Think about the people in your life that you haven't heard from in a while and reach out to them with a text or a phone call – even a literal snail mail letter!

Many people you know may have struggled with depression and anxiety or another mental health concern that may increase their feelings of isolation. Others may be immunosuppressed or their health is compromised and they are in “super lockdown.” These people may need some extra attention and care and while you can't fix their health concerns, you can show that you care and that helps. Helping others feel better will help you feel better too.

Send a quick message to someone whenever you think about that person. Don't stop yourself because you are worried about bothering them or worry that they are dealing with their own stress. They probably are, but reaching out helps reduce stress for you and that person.

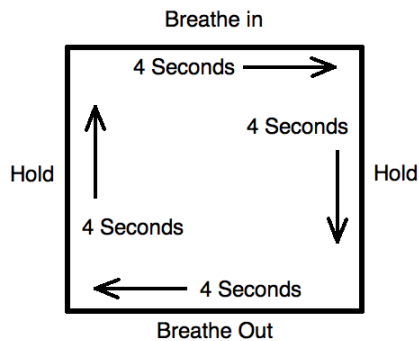
5. Practice mindfulness and acceptance.

This time is unexpected and unprecedented and you are likely experiencing some anxiety and worry about your health and the health of the people close to you. It's uncomfortable and when we are uncomfortable we often try to push those feelings away. Unfortunately, they aren't going anywhere and we all need to figure out how to cope with them.

One strategy for coping with anxiety and discomfort is mindfulness. We will have more information about different mindfulness practices coming soon to this space and there are more resources here:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/counseling/selfguidedsupport.html>

If you find yourself feeling more anxiety and worry, try to practice Square Breathing. Square Breathing is a technique that can help calm your breathing and slow down racing thoughts. It's easy and worth practicing whenever you have a moment.



Follow these simple steps:

1. Breathe in for 4 seconds.
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Breathe out for 4 seconds
4. Hold for 4 seconds
5. Repeat as needed

Photo source: <http://dharmaeverywave.com/square-breathing/>

Cool .gif that you can watch to practice this kind of breathing:

<https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/wellness-prevention/3-easy-exercises-for-anxiety-relief-you-can-use-anywhere>

Remember to take care of yourself and to take care of others by washing your hands and remembering that your mental health is important! If you need some additional support from the Counseling Center, call (507) 389-1455 (M-F 8:00 am – 4:30 pm) and ask to talk with a counselor about your concerns.