

MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

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2020 has been an extraordinary year – February had its 29 leap year days; March seemingly had 100 days; April had close to two hundred days;... May...

1918...I don't even remember my parents' remembering of that pandemic – they weren't born yet and I don't remember any grandparents talking about it. 1957-58 flu...I was too young –I guess we just stayed away from coastal cities on the east coast; 1968 brought a new influenza virus killed 100,000 in the US and 1,000,000 worldwide. I'm trying to remember anything I knew around that pandemic – nada .The CDC website, found by googling Pandemics...much info about the flu, vaccines, and by 2017 they listed actions individuals and communities can take to help slow the spread flu like staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent hand washing.

We're probably all familiar with this information about previous pandemics...

This global coronavirus-covid 19 pandemic has forced people around the world to embrace a new normal in isolation. Aside from the very good this does, it produces many problems for us.

Fear and uncertainty are causing [stress levels to surge](#) and more people than ever are [experiencing the effects of loneliness](#), which makes it more important than ever to take care of our mental health, both communal and individual.

A recent [Washington Post-ABC News poll](#) showed 7 in 10 Americans citing the virus outbreak as a source of stress and 1 in 3 saying it has caused "serious" stress. Loneliness isn't just in your head -- the feeling can have an impact on your physical wellbeing, too. Even when we aren't facing a global pandemic, social isolation can increase the risk of early death by as much as 26 percent, a [study](#) from Brigham Young University found.

"Loneliness is related to many different emotions -- it can tie into anxiety, depression or even boredom," Dayry Hulkow, M.S., Therapist . "There could be tension in the body or we could be more hungry than we usually get. Maybe we're more tired, lethargic or maybe we have too much energy and feel restless."

Experts share their tips on how to cope with these uncertain times.

KEEP A "NORMAL" ROUTINE

While your commute whether to work or Sunday-go-to-meeting has now been reduced to walking from bed to your home workspace, or a walk around the block, you still don't have to give up some of your daily rituals. Indeed as I was speaking with some of you on the phone a few weeks ago, you were telling me about your daily routines.

Focus on managing the things you can control, like the times you eat meals and when you wake up and go to sleep at night. Then, planning an afternoon activity each day, like taking a walk, can help maintain a sense of normalcy.

STAY ACTIVE

Staying active doesn't mean you have to suddenly work out every day if that wasn't something you did pre-quarantine. However, when you are working, living and eating in the same place, you're likely moving your body less than you would on a normal day.

"Three key systems that are amplified in times of stress are your nervous, endocrine (produces hormones), and your immune system. Persistent stress can create imbalances in these three systems that can lead to illnesses," Dr. First says. "Ensuring you maintain a healthy diet and exercise, a nutritional supplement that supports those three systems can keep you in good health."

Taking a walk, stretching or doing yoga are simple ways to get your body moving while social distancing. If you're looking for something more challenging to get your blood pumping, there are tons of [at-home workouts streaming](#) for free right now.

ALL OF THIS IS WELL AND GOOD...

BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR FRIENDS, OUR FAMILIES?

HOW DO WE STAY

CONNECTED WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Even though we can't physically see all of our friends and family at the moment, there are many ways to socialize digitally. Scheduling a phone call or video call with friends in the way you normally would schedule drinks or dinner can help reduce the feeling of loneliness. I, who have previously ignored the

FaceTime app on my phone, discovered it with a dr. appt...and soon thereafter had conversations/visits with my niece in NJ and her kids.

"Even the perception of social isolation activates the stress response, which we are all likely experiencing at the moment," says Dr. First. "That is why it is important to stay connected virtually, finding comfort in knowing that you don't need to be alone even if you are home by yourself."

Aside from phone calls and video chats, there are many creative ways you can connect with others, like sending a handwritten letter, joining a video app like [Houseparty](#), where you can play games, or if you are not tired of it yet, use Zoom.

SET BOUNDARIES

Our entire lives exist inside of our homes now. From work to household chores and childcare, we're doing it all in one place, which in itself can cause stress and confusion.

"It is important to first establish clear times for work and if possible in a separate part of the house and then time for family and related household tasks," Dr. First explains.

Aside from daily responsibilities you should also clear time in your schedule for "Taking some 'me time': like reading, or finally organizing that closet ... helps shift your mindset back to the present away from the stress

CREATE OR ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES

Now is a "good opportunity to learn something new,". Whether it's trying a new hobby, learning to dance or paint, even just trying a new recipe, there are endless activities to keep entertained. ...suggests engaging in positive activities that will ease your mind. Some ideas include:

- Watch movies or TV with a positive message
- [Take a virtual tour](#)
- Write about your experience or do some creative writing
- Draw or paint
- Work on a home project
- Play games with friends/family in your home

recommends also integrating "fun de-stressing activities" into your day, like cuddling with a dog or stuffed animal, or engaging your [five senses](#).

"Literally stop and smell the roses! Aromatherapy is a simple and proven way to reduce stress and smells great too! Take your time when you're eating your meals, really think about how it tastes, smells, and how it feels in your mouth," he says. "Integrating a new structure for work/life along with mini-de-stressing activities can keep you on task and sane during this current environment."

SET GOALS

The pandemic may seem never-ending, but eventually, we will be able to get back to our regular lives, according to some dreamers. Your goals for yourself don't have to vanish. Set goals and spend time "exploring ways to achieve them" during this time. Refocusing on goals you had pre-coronavirus or setting

new goals will give you something to look forward to. You could also create a list of things you're excited to do after isolation.

I want to tell you about an experience I'm having right now on Facebook. Many of you know that I am a dog lover—specifically Pomeranians. Over the years I have had six – five at a time .I lost one a year ago to a stroke. Friday a week ago I had to have my oldest put down. As those of you who found yourselves in similar situations know, this was not at all easy. But I belong to a group on FB called “Love of Pomeranians.” I posted my decision to this list as well as my news feed and together I had more than 350 responses. People had seen the dog's pictures and the people on the Pomeranian website had gotten to know me and all my dogs in some detail. The overwhelming support from them and you and my old friends helped me through that difficult decision. While not pandemically related, there was much support, love, and connection from all, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

So how important is connecting not only through this pandemic – but for some, loneliness did not hit us just because of this virus. Some folks have been lonely for a long time. “Loneliness is not the physical absence of other people. It is the sense that you're not sharing anything that matters with anyone else.:

Johann Hari

"I know this is really difficult right now but this is temporary and this is going to pass and we'll eventually go back to our lives." Okay but how?

We heard from Scott last week about “purposeful adaptation and resilience...bouncing back from those life events” that try to squeeze us to death. I want to share with you one other thing from Scott, from a sermon of

about 15 years ago. In order to be able to have a resilience – a right relationship, a caring relationship, a depth relationship with ourselves and with others, with the culture and with the whole of creation, we must build or expand upon an interior architecture that allows us to foster those relationships. That interior architecture comes from what we call our own spiritual development. Surely this period of social isolation can lend itself to our own spiritual growth. And this is what we do in community – right here – or at least for now, close by maintaining the relationships we have with others: through phone calls to each other to just check in; through YouTube worship serves, Zoom meetings, conversation with friends and family however we can manage. It's the maintenance of those relationships that will get us all through this difficult period.

Don't be afraid – take each others' hands – virtually - you are not alone.
Blessed be.