

Ideas for Overcoming Loneliness During COVID-19

1. Practice self-kindness. In difficult moments, it's essential to practice self-kindness. So limit your hurtful self-talk, engage in some self-care, and just generally give yourself a break. Perhaps a walk in nature or a relaxing activity at home may be helpful for getting yourself into a self-kindness mood. Practice self-compassion when you fail at things. Remember, everyone fails, and there is no need to be a bully to yourself, feel guilty, or put yourself down. That kind of attitude won't help you decrease loneliness, now or in the future. So instead, try talking to yourself in a way that is supportive, kind, and caring.

2. Capitalize on the present moment. When you feel good about something, share it with others right away, and I don't mean "share" by posting on your social media. You could share by calling or texting a friend. Or share with the people you work with. Keep in mind that the positive things that you can share don't have to be big. You could simply have woken up on the right side of the bed and think, "Hey, I'm feeling great today." By sharing these moments, you create small moments of connection with others that can help you overcome loneliness.

3. Rethink how you spend your spare time. When we feel lonely, sometimes we just want to retreat into a corner and hide. Other times, our endless to-do list may leave us too exhausted to spend time talking with others, either on the phone or on video chat. If we instead use our loneliness to motivate us to reach out to people, then we can strengthen our relationships. By opting to cope with our loneliness by seeking out social support, we create more social moments with the people in our lives who matter to us, which usually reduces our loneliness.

4. Talk to strangers. A growing body of research suggests that even seemingly trivial interactions with strangers—like chatting with a barista or cashier—may be able to keep loneliness at bay by helping us feel more socially connected. So if you get out to get groceries or other essential items, keep the 6ft distance and health guidelines but reach out to other human beings to say hello and ask them how they are doing. These small acts can make a big difference and help you reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

5. Be active online. Instead of passively surfing the net or your social media, if you want to go online, opt instead to do something that involves the active participation of other people. For example, you could play games with others, chat about something you care about, give advice on a forum, or have a video call with a friend. The more you interact with others while online, the more connected you are likely to feel.

6. Share for real online. We often post on social media about cool things we did or nice meals we ate—all things that we didn't actually share with the people who are viewing our posts.

Instead of posting about things you did, reclaim the word “share” for what it really means—to give a small or large portion of what is yours to someone else. You could share advice, words of support, or even empathy, all from your smartphone. As a result, your connections are likely to be more kind and supportive.

7. Try focusing more on others/volunteer. It's almost inevitable in our modern technology-crazed world that we start to believe we don't have enough. We compare ourselves to what others have or do. We also see false or unrealistic images—models photoshopped to have perfect waists and abs—and we feel envious. As a result, we become increasingly focused on how we are not measuring up.

Instead of focusing on what you feel you don't have, shift your focus to what you can give. You could sell something online to raise money for a good cause. You could ask friends to donate to a charity for your birthday. You could pick up something that you know someone else needs and leave it by their doorstep. You might sew masks for local hospitals, spread the word online about needs of an essential organization, or volunteer to teach a free class/activity online. By giving to others, you take the focus off yourself and do good at the same time, helping you to feel more connected and less lonely.

8. Stop your negative thought cycles. We might repeatedly think about what we could have done differently to prevent ourselves from feeling so alone. We ruminate on the events or people or causes, because we mistakenly believe that thinking about our loneliness over and over again will help us solve it. Unfortunately, it does us no good to get caught up in our thoughts instead of taking the actions we need to feel better.

To put an end to these negative thought cycles, we need to take action—do something different that stops these thoughts and changes our experience of the world. For example, try a new activity or start a gratitude journal.

9. Generate a sense of awe. Awe (like when we witness the birth of new baby, or a majestic mountain) makes time seem like it's standing still and helps us be more open to connecting. Something about feeling small in the context of a big world appears to help us see ourselves as part of a whole, which may help us feel less alone. So expose yourself to something that creates awe—like landscapes, new experiences, or new foods. Consider looking up ways

10. Plan a fun experience for the future. If you can, start putting a little money away for a future experience. Get creative and think about what you want to do with others when it is safe to do so again. Get others involved in the planning. For example, I might go on a canoeing trip, go wine tasting, plan a beach party, or host an arts & crafts night. What group activities might make you feel less lonely?

11. Pay attention to the things that matter. How do we expect to improve our loneliness when we don't know what causes it? It's hard. So it's helpful to start paying attention to the present moment. What are the experiences that make you feel lonely? And what are the experiences that make you feel connected or like you belong? Identifying these moments can help you reduce loneliness, because you can limit your engagement in activities that make you feel lonely and increase your engagement in activities that make you feel connected.

12. Create a vision board. I keep a vision board tacked up by my desk to remind me of my goals. A big chunk of my vision board is about connecting—building community, networking, spending time with family, and the like. Sometimes I have a hard time sticking to it, but having the vision board reminds me to. Once you discover the things that make you feel less lonely and more connected, it can be helpful to create a board or list or plan for what you'll do—whether it's things you can do now or in the future, when social distancing ends.

13. Tend to your network. Sometimes we can end up feeling alone even though we are connected to lots of people. So it can be helpful to reach out to these people and schedule times to catch up on the phone or over video. Who knows, maybe an old friendship can be reignited. Consider getting a “pen pal” and write letters back and forth. Do a virtual “happy hour” or “movie night.”

14. Join an online group of like-minded people. You can now find people online with just about any interest — for example, politics, cooking, or sports. Joining one of these mission-oriented groups can be a way to feel more connected to others, even when you don't have access to face-to-face interactions. You might get to know some new people or make lifelong friends. You can even try out a few groups to see which ones fit you best and decrease your loneliness the most.

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