

Coping with Social Isolation

Feeling claustrophobic? Being quarantined, social distancing, and sheltering in place feel like a loss of control. This is a stressful situation, and may decrease wellbeing, tax relationships, and test personal resilience.

Common reactions to social isolation include restlessness or outright agitation, disturbed sleep, anxiety, anger, boredom, irritability, loneliness, and cabin fever.

So how do you cope? First, remember we're all in this together. Next, embrace strategies proven to support coping in the face of imposed separation from others. Here are a few to try:

- ▶ **Create a routine.** Having a regular schedule of activities creates structure and purpose. Studies show that predictable routines lower anxiety.
- ▶ **Tackle projects.** Use this hiatus to catch up on projects that have been backburned. Doing something productive increases our feelings of personal power, restoring a sense of control during a time of uncertainty.



- ▶ **Play games.** Video and board games help pass the time. Using both types offers variety, which helps keep the mind engaged and interested. Gaming with others, whether in person or online, reduces feelings of isolation.
- ▶ **Go outside.** As little as ten minutes outside increases the amount of serotonin and dopamine (both “feel good” chemicals) in the brain. Being in nature often decreases the sense that the walls are “closing in.”
- ▶ **Exercise.** Even short bursts of exercise positively impacts mood. If you can't go for a walk, try stretching, climbing stairs, doing push-ups, or finding an online exercise routine.
- ▶ **Learn.** If you've always wanted to learn a new language, take an online course, or focus on a creative project, now is the time. Learning and creative activities force us to engage with the present moment, rather than worrying about what might happen next.
- ▶ **Connect.** A Harris poll found an estimated 70% of people reported feeling lonely on a frequent basis. Social isolation exacerbates this issue, particularly for the elderly. Ramp up your interactions with others, whether by phone, digitally, or via snail mail. Now more than ever, we need each other.

Whether you want to brainstorm more ideas for increasing your sense of control or just need to talk with someone for a while, LifeMatters can help. Call 24/7/365.