

Isolation Survival Guide: Caring for Yourself and Your Family

Isolation is difficult. As naturally social creatures, we crave contact with others and the freedom to travel. But with government warnings to remain home and avoid contact with people outside our families, it's natural that we might feel anxious, isolated and frustrated. The following tips can help you and your family members maintain your health and well-being during these challenging times.

Keeping in Touch

- Arrange when possible to video chat with friends and family members you'd normally see in person. The added ability to see faces is important to your social well-being.
- If video chat isn't an option, set times to talk on the phone or just text when you feel the need to reach out.
- Keep in mind that you can continue to meet with your book or movie club, or other social group. You just can't do it in person. Create a group chat, arrange a video chat or simply email each other your thoughts on the book or movie.
- This is also a good time to check whether your email addresses and phone numbers are up to date. Page through and call or email family and friends. If the number or address is right, chat for a while. If it isn't, call around and ask if anyone else has the information.
- Put together digital scrapbooks with photos of friends and share them. Reminisce about the good times you've had and make plans for get-togethers once it's safe to do so.

Make Connections With Others in Similar Situations

- Check out your local community website, facebook group or similar online gathering spots. There are likely plenty of people in the same situation. Share tips, or just relate stories about how you're spending your time. They may have good ideas of their own.
- Stay active on social media, but keep in mind, you can get too much of a good thing. Also, avoid political discussions and information about the coronavirus. You're likely getting enough of that from the news media. Use your online time to distract yourself and be social.

Commit to a Routine

- Plan out your time. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. This is especially important if you have small children, who crave routine.
- Try to follow your routine as much as possible. Get up at the same time everyday, follow your usual morning routines, and go to bed at your usual time. Set alarms to remind you of your new schedule.
- As part of your schedule, plan activities to do on different days.
- This can be a great time to improve your routine, too. If your bedtime has been creeping later and later, set an earlier bedtime and plan to get up earlier and exercise, meditate or to simply take some time for yourself.
- Remember, during or normally busy lives, most of us would love some more free time. Now is your chance to take advantage of it.

For families:

- Agree on a household routine. Try to give everyone you live with a say in this agreement.
- Schedule regular dinners together so you can catch up. Even if you've spent all day together, it's unlikely, between work and chores, that you've had a lot of time to talk.
- Try to respect each other's privacy and give each other space. For example, some people might want to discuss everything they're doing while others won't.

Keep Active

Build physical activity into your daily routine. Even if you don't have home exercise equipment, there's still plenty you can do, no matter what your fitness level. Try:

- Vigorous cleaning such as mopping and wiping down windows burns calories
- Have a spontaneous dance party
- Walk or jog up and down stairs a few times
- Check out online exercise workouts that you can follow
- Stretch, try a few yoga poses or do simple calisthenics like jumping jacks
- Wrestle with your kids or play indoor tag or hide-and-go- seek

Seek Out Sunlight, Fresh Air and Nature

Sunlight, fresh air and nature are vital to mental health and well-being. Each can improve mood, reduce stress and anger, and ease tension. While it might not be possible to get outside at the moment, you can try to bring some nature inside:

- Open windows to let in fresh air
- Flowers and potted plants can elevate mood and have even been shown in studies to improve indoor air quality.
- Bring in some natural elements such as fern fronds or cut some early growth flowers and arrange them in a vase
- Find a comfortable space by a window where you can get a view of trees or the sky. Watch birds and other animals, if they're around.
- Pull up photos of your favorite places in nature. Take a virtual tour of the national parks. NPS.gov offers photos and videos of the best sites in each of the parks. Or take a virtual tour on Google maps. You'll be surprised at how immersive an experience it can be.
- Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall.
- Get as much natural sunlight as you can. Spend time in your yard, if you have one, or sit in an open window or on your doorstep.

Parenting Tips

- Think about being more lenient with your children's social media and mobile phone use during their time away from school. Children and young people who go to school will be used to being around other children for several hours a day. They might find it difficult to be removed from this, especially if they're also worried about their health.
- In addition to their online school work, encourage your children to choose some books or podcasts they'd like to explore. You can also think about card games, board games and puzzles, and other ways to stay mentally active or be creative.
- For older kids, there are free online courses they could try out. For example, [Kahn Academy](#), [Future Learn](#) and even [Harvard](#) offer classes covering everything from basic math to computer programming. Your local library might also have online activities or resources you can use.

Find Ways to Use Your Time

- It's time for spring cleaning. Think about tackling that overstuffed closet, crawl space or garage. Box things to donate and others to dispose of. Once isolation is over, you can quickly send them to the appropriate place.
- Do the same for your digital life. Clear old apps, files, emails and programs from your computer. Upgrade whatever software is out of date and check to make sure all your passwords are up to date.
- We all contract with service providers: grocery deliveries, move and TV subscriptions, cleaners, even power providers, in some areas. Take this time to research alternatives and compare costs.
- How are your finances? Now's the perfect time to review you accounts and get a picture of how close you are to your financial goals. Try signing up for a service like [Nerd Wallet](#) so you can keep all your information in one place.

Hobby Time

- Nothing's more important during a long stretch stuck inside than hobbies, for example:
- Arts and crafts, such as drawing, painting, collage and sewing
- Home improvement projects
- Try coloring, there are books for kids and adults
- Take up an instrument you've always wanted to learn, or try just singing to the
- Journaling or writing

Keep Your Mind Stimulated

- Keep your brain occupied and challenged. Set aside time in your routine for this. Read books, magazines and articles. Listen to podcasts, watch films and do puzzles.
- Your local libraries may have apps you can use to borrow ebooks, audiobooks or magazines from home for free
- There are lots of apps that can help you learn things, such as a foreign language or other new skills.

Resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov
- Mind.org: www.mind.org.uk