

Understanding Loneliness

Loneliness is an emotional response to perceived isolation. Loneliness can also motivate us to seek out social connections. It is often associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy. Loneliness overlaps, and yet is distinct from, solitude. Solitude is simply the state of being apart from others, and not everyone who experiences solitude feels lonely.

The feeling of loneliness can strike us at any time and can be real or perceived. It's only natural that given the COVID-19 situation, where we are more isolated from the people in our lives, that we may feel lonely at times. This may be particularly so for people who live alone or may live with people that they have poor relationships with. Here are a few strategies to reduce feelings of loneliness.

Connect with others

When we're isolated and separated from our friends, colleagues and loved ones, it is more important than ever to reach out to people for support and connection. Just because we can't see people physically, doesn't mean that our communication needs to stop. Take stock of the connections you already have:

- ◆ Call someone for a chat
- ◆ Arrange a virtual coffee meeting
- ◆ Write a letter or card to someone
- ◆ Send an email to someone
- ◆ Reach out to someone on social media

If the thought of this creates anxiety or worry for you, remember you can do this one step at a time. Start with what is most comfortable for you. Don't forget that others may be feeling the same as you and that you could be helping them as well by reaching out.

If you feel you have no one to reach out to, identify some old friends, former colleagues or family you would like to reconnect with. If you are working – you could reach out to a current colleague for a chat. It's also important to think about your day to day activities, like walking, shopping, or exercise. Say hello to people on your daily walk and speak to the cashier when you are buying your groceries.

Virtual groups

In the current situation, more virtual groups and clubs are being created. Are you interested in learning a new language, exercising, joining a book club, cooking or just talking to new people? Search online for a group of interest that you could join and start participating. Consider Facebook groups, Meetup app or even Gumtree.

Make plans to participate

Sometimes when you're feeling lonely, you might start turning down opportunities to spend time with people without realising it. Be diligent in texting or calling people back when they reach out to you. Try to say YES if you receive an invitation that will give you an opportunity to connect to others.

Write it down

Writing is a great way to battle loneliness and make sense of the way you are feeling. It can assist you to process your emotions and get a clearer idea of where your head is at. Great ways to do this including starting a journal, jotting your thoughts down in a notebook or on a Word document; whatever works for you is good!

Engage on social media

Social media can be a great way to stay in touch with people, however it can also have a negative impact on our lives. Ask yourself, *am I using social media to make meaningful connections? Am I spending too much time on it? How does it make me feel? Is it causing me to withdraw in unhelpful ways?*

Social media can connect us with people, ideas and information. It can also make us feel inadequate if we negatively compare ourselves to others. If social media is bringing you down, take a temporary screen detox.

Animals

Animals are great at making us feel connected and cared for. Pets, especially dogs and cats, can reduce stress, anxiety, depression and can ease loneliness. If you don't own a pet, you could consider pet minding or dog walking. Do you have an elderly neighbour that needs help with dog walking? Are there any online groups you could join in relation to looking after pets? Can you contact a local animal shelter to see if they have pets requiring temporary accommodation or regular care?

Other considerations:

- ◆ Get into a healthy daily routine – scheduling in time for relaxation and pleasant activities you could do
- ◆ Schedule in daily exercises e.g. learn yoga, dancing or any other exercise that you may be interested in and can find online, or go for daily walks
- ◆ Stretch your mind through various avenues such as online courses, puzzles, podcasts or reading
- ◆ Develop better thinking habits by identifying unhelpful thought patterns and making conscious choices of more helpful ways to think

Ask for help

If you need help, don't hesitate to reach out for help. The Assure team are here for you at any time.