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Loneliness

The global pandemic has brought a host of new and unsettling experiences, including working from home, home-schooling and online socialising, as well of course having to go into lockdown and quarantine, so it's hardly surprising that for many people their feelings of loneliness have increased. Some may have felt socially isolated before the physical distancing began, while others are having to cope with life-altering experiences on their own, such as the loss of a job or a loved one.

Pamela Qualter, a professor of psychology for education at the University of Manchester, defines loneliness as "not necessarily about being on your own, but about feeling a disconnect with other people – a sense that the relationships you have aren't satisfying your emotional needs," she goes on to say that "Loneliness is a subjective experience, so it's not always obvious to us. There are some people who are currently isolated who will not get lonely and there are others who will really struggle."

In 2018 a BBC study into loneliness among the British public found that out of the 55,000 respondents, a third said they often feel lonely, and this was before the lockdown. Qualter goes on to say "Our isolation is going to trigger loneliness in many people, some who might never have experienced it for extended periods of time before. You might be with your family and feel lonely, since we fall into different roles and hide parts of ourselves, or you might feel lonely even if you are video-calling constantly, as that can sometimes emphasise our distance from others."

Loneliness can affect everyone, irrespective of age, gender, socio economic background and family circumstances. And although there has been much focus on the isolation of elderly people, a BBC study found that younger adults were the most likely to report feelings of loneliness and that such feelings "tend to decrease with age". After all many young people are often surrounded by other young people so suddenly being more isolated is a paradigm shift for them both physically and emotionally.

Cal Strobe, of the Mental Health Foundation, said that loneliness among young people could be driven by social media and the "digital world". "Teens can have thousands of friends online and yet feel unsupported and isolated. Technology, including social media, could be exacerbating social isolation," he said. So, the view that the elderly feel more lonely than the young might not be an accurate reflection of how it really is out there today for our youth. Trying to make your way in an uncertain and unsettling world whilst dealing with puberty and other major life changes such as University, a new job or living arrangements can cause anxiety and make us feel very alone.

Below are various ideas that can help you to manage those feelings of loneliness, whether you live on your own or with other people. As always some will resonate more with you so look at them as an a la carte menu and choose the ones that feel the most comfortable for you.

Let's start with the one that is very important in helping to ward off those feelings of loneliness.



Share your feelings

Where possible opening up to a loved one, friend, doctor or religious/spiritual contact about how you are feeling can make a big difference to your mood. Just having a chance to unburden ourselves and let off steam, to be heard, and have human contact can really lift our spirit. And if you feel by opening up you are being a bother or burden to someone else, then please do remember you may be giving that person permission to also open up, so you can both benefit from the exchange.



Stay in The Here & Now

Enjoy as best you can your everyday without thinking too much ahead, create moments of comfort and connection and try and ensure small daily pleasures. When we stay in the here and now we are not distracted by ruminations on the past or worries about the future.

Wallow in Nostalgia

Research has shown that summoning up happy memories can help you feel connected, alleviate loneliness and give life more meaning. So now might be the time to get out those old photographs, books and personal possessions that have meaning and engender happy memories, and really savour the good feelings they bring up.

Turning Loneliness into Solitude

For many the feelings of being alone can be uncomfortable, even excruciating. But with Covid-19 we are not able to reach out and make contact with others in the same way we have in the past, which often means spending more time alone. At times like this we have to think practically and creatively about what we can do to help ourselves as best we can in the world we are inhabiting. As Dr Tim Lomas says in his great book *The Positive Power of Negative Emotions* “we can transform the ache of loneliness into the tranquillity of solitude”.



This involves learning to appreciate the potential value and beauty of aloneness, rather than trying to ‘solve’ it through a continual search for company. Being away from the constant hum of human activity can give us time to really focus, to breathe slowly and get in touch with our body, to think about what is important to us. Even better if we are outside with nature where we can appreciate the wonder and awe of the calm beyond civilisation.

It might take a while before you are able to cope better with being alone, but once you can it becomes maybe the most important relationship you will have - the relationship you have with yourself.

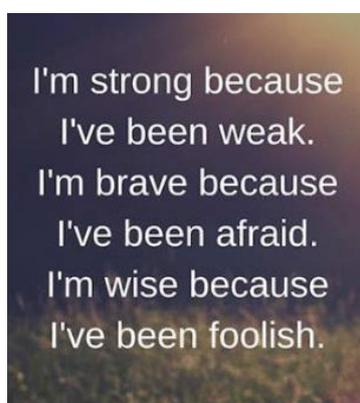
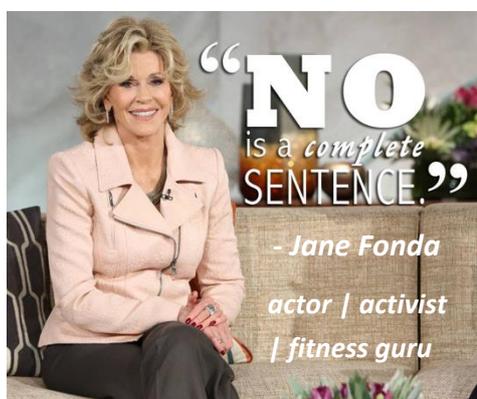
There are a few advantages to being alone at this time which Tony Robinson writes about on the Website *Lifhack*:

- Time spent alone can be some of the most productive time in your life—mostly because there are fewer distractions, and you can just put your head down and get to work.
- Solitude sparks creativity. According to research, being in a private, secluded space allows you to be more creative. That’s why artists, authors, and musicians seek solitude when they want to create something new.
- Once you’re alone, the only person’s happiness you have to worry about in that moment is your own. You can treat yourself to things that makes you happy, without worrying about someone else.
- The time spent alone gives you a greater appreciation for yourself. It also lets you appreciate all the great things that come from your relationship with other people, that you may have been oblivious to before.

- Being alone allows one to be and feel their true self. Researchers found that by spending time alone and taking a moment for self-reflection, to think about our goals, our concerns, and our self we are able to define and confirm our identities with less influence from other people
- When you start to enjoy being alone, you'll gain a greater perspective for your own emotions. You'll create a deeper understanding of what makes you happy, what upsets you, and what saddens you.
- It's easier to enjoy being alone once you realize that doing so gives you more freedom to do the things you actually want to do.
- When you start to spend more time alone, you'll learn to trust your instincts and make decisions without needing another person's validation.



Quotes of The Month



(I love this quote from Jane Fonda and it's my new go to reply for my kids!!)

Silver Lining

Studies have shown (Times Health Section October 2020) that our brains and bodies respond to bouts of silence in the same way they respond to meditation, by lowering stress hormones and breathing rates, so that afterwards, better levels of concentration and calmness take hold. Learning to appreciate the benefits of some silence in your life instead of trying to fill it might be beneficial to your physical and mental well-being. In the Western world we often feel uncomfortable when there is silence, always wanting to fill the vacuum. Yet in many Eastern countries silence when with others is very acceptable, even the norm.

Shared Space

The following two articles have some helpful information about how to combat feelings of loneliness:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/28/the-extreme-loneliness-of-lockdown-even-though-my-partner-is-here-im-struggling-to-cope>
- <https://patient.info/news-and-features/covid-19-how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Directory of Websites/ Helplines

For oldies but goodies:

Age UK

Age UK is the country's leading charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life.

For those of you who are older and need advice, Age UK has a 24-hour helpline, and a website with lots of information for the aged including info on finance, loneliness, befriending services, shopping, transport, IT Training and advice on staying safe during Covid.

There are also local Age UK services for your area. The Age UK network has more than 130 local Age UKs throughout England.

For example, Barnet has their own website with lots of information for people in the area. Go to the National Website (link below - put your postcode in and you will see information for your area).

Website: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/>

Advice Line advice line on 0800 055 6112

The Silver Line

The Silver Line is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Website: <https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/>

Helpline: 0800 4 70 80 90

For Every Age:

Samaritans

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Mental Health Charity Directory

Whether you're concerned about yourself or a loved one, these mental health charities, organisations and support groups can offer expert advice.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

References

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/28/the-extreme-loneliness-of-lockdown-even-though-my-partner-is-here-im-struggling-to-cope>
- <https://patient.info/news-and-features/covid-19-how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>
- Meik Wiking - The Times (Weekend Section) Saturday September 17th
- Tim Lomas - The Positive Power of Negative Emotions