

Senior Advisor Column..... For

Challenge of Coping with Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness

By

The Cortland County Area Agency on Aging

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Contributing Writer

Question: I am feeling very isolated during this COVID-19 outbreak. Even though I have everything I need, I feel very much cut off from people. I keep up on the news by watching television and my family calls and drops off food and other items I need. But they don't visit long. They say I am at "high risk" for contracting the virus and they don't want to infect me. I know restrictions are loosening but I still feel so alone.

Answer: Many older adults feel isolated and lonely when they can no longer be as independent as they used to be. The Coronavirus Pandemic has only made these feelings worse for our seniors. We've heard from others who are going through the same feelings as you. These months of isolation have most certainly tested our ability to cope with restrictions of staying at home and our very real fears of contracting the virus. Please know your family means well and only want you to be safe. The separation from loved ones can be very challenging.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) keeping a regular routine such as eating, sleeping and showering at regular times help us to maintain some sort of normalcy. Keeping up with an exercise program is also helpful to promote good health and feelings of well-being.

With the warmer weather finally upon us, perhaps spending time sitting out of doors getting more fresh air and sunshine may help to make you feel better. Perhaps setting up a bird feeder outside your window or growing a small in-door herb garden might brighten your days. Baking cookies for your family or neighbors would give you a feeling of giving to others. The "cut and bake" cookies taste great. It's the thought that counts. Easy to assemble arts and craft projects that can be shared with grandchildren or a friend might cheer both you and the receiver. Picking up the phone to reach out to a long lost friend may increase feelings of re-connectedness.

For those who use computers, a good way to communicate with others is through the use of apps like Face Time and Zoom. Signing up for Facebook, or checking local agency websites such as the Area Agency on Aging, Seven Valley Health Coalition, Cortland County Mental Health, Access to Independence, and Family Counseling Services are only a few locally available. Using a computer can

feel like a daunting challenge, but may open up a whole new world of communicating. Learning the basics is a beginning. There are many teaching programs on the web for first time users.

There are also local organizations that are more than happy to help individuals in need. The Office of Mental Health has set up an emotional support line, (1-844-863-9314) to help those who are feeling overwhelmed and are in need of talking to someone. Liberty Resources also has a warm line (1-855-778-1900) for those feeling down, lonely or isolated. Sharing your thoughts with your doctor is also vitally important in addressing your overall health and wellbeing.

The Area Aging on Aging recognizes the needs of older adults during these challenging times. They are launching new programs to help individuals cope with isolation and loneliness by providing Zoom activities and a new Pen Friend program. Please be on the lookout for more information.

In the meantime, for more tips on ways to cope during this unprecedented restrictive time, feel free to call NY Connects at the Area Agency on Aging at (607)-756-3485 or (607)-753-5060.

If you have a question for the Senior Advisor, call the Area Aging on Aging at (607) 753-5060 or write to the Agency at 60 Central Ave., Cortland, N.Y., 13045