



# SPRING NEWSLETTER



## Social Distancing and Mental Health

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By now I am sure most of you have likely been impacted in some way by COVID-19, the new viral strain of coronavirus that affects your respiratory system. You or someone you know may have been directly infected with the virus, your employer may have asked you to begin working from home, and/or you may have had to clear your spring social calendar due to social distancing guidelines. While these new guidelines could be considered an “introvert’s dream”, for many of us social distancing guidelines can be a trigger for depression and anxiety. For some, depression and anxiety symptoms may increase while for others it may be their first experience with these symptoms. It is important for those experiencing the symptoms and those around them to understand two things: why are the symptoms present and what ways can we look for the positives during this time to help combat those symptoms?

Let’s first talk about why the symptoms present themselves or increase during a time like the present. Simply put social distancing and isolation require us to remove ourselves from the contact of others, which often results in a reduction and/or change in the kind of support we receive to help manage our mental health. For many, the ability to be in contact with others through being in the office with coworkers, grabbing dinner after a long week with friends, or attending the concert of our favorite artist with a family member has been a form of self-care. Self-care and those interactions with others outside of your home play an important role in reducing the sense of disconnection, despair, fear, and/or hopelessness you may feel. These feelings along with others are how depression and anxiety present themselves.

So how can we find the positives and work to combat those feelings during a time like this? The past few weeks I have found myself in a bit of a paradox while being quarantined and practicing safe social distancing. Many need a reason to slow down from the hustle and bustle of the fast paced world we live in. While others have spent most of the winter isolating themselves and could really use this time to get back into a routine of meeting with friends, going to the gym, and other activities with others in their community. The key is finding a balance that works best for you and focusing on what you CAN do rather than what you can’t.

For those who relate to the need to slow down this is a great time to reflect on your accomplishments and begin focusing on things you have been putting off. What better time to read that book you bought last summer but haven’t had time to read yet or spend time with your kids at home going through pictures and videos you’ve collected over the years. You could use this time to begin learning a new language you’ve always wanted to or focus on a hobby you’ve always wanted to try.

As for those of you who relate more to isolating and needing to pick activities back up, how do you decrease your isolation while being forced to social distance? A great place to start is with the technology you most likely already have access to. You could call up a friend/family member you haven’t spoken to in awhile or connect with someone through email or social media. If you have access you could set up a video chat with a few of your favorite people and watch a movie together or a show you all enjoy. You could tap into your artsy side and paint some pictures to mail or fax to a local organization or you could begin building a bucket list of things you plan to do after this is all over.

Whichever category you find yourself relating to (or maybe you fall somewhere in between), utilizing this time for good is the goal. Use this time to reflect on what in your life adds value that helps to improve your mental health and work to remove the things that cause strain on your mental health.

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## TIPS FOR THRIVING DURING ISOLATION

1. Find a supportive person you can talk to; (Pastor, therapist, coach, parent, relative, best friend, higher power) While social distancing guidelines can make connecting with your support person more difficult, it is not impossible. Many therapists and coaches have technology set up to do online or phone sessions, so if you already have an established therapist or coach please check with them. If you are thinking now is a perfect time to start seeing one a great resource for finding help would be Psychology Today. If it's a friend or family member that you wish to connect with there are a number of video chat options for some face-to-face time, such as, FaceTime through apple products, Skype, Zoom, and a few others. A simple google search could put you in connection with the right choice for you. If video chat is not an option you can always call, text, email, or write letters to exchange support.

2. Be mindful of how much media you consume. It is, of course, important to stay informed in these trying times, but it is also important to be mindful of the impact media consumption has on you. Too much information can lead to negative thoughts and increase anxiety. Give yourself an allotted amount of time each day to watch the news and stick to it.

3. Build projects and events into your calendar that you can reasonably count on. Life on the outside may be in a bit of a pause mode, but that doesn't mean it will always be that way. If it helps you to daydream or sketch out trips you may take in Spring 2021, do it! Daydream, research and loosely plan for activities this winter or into next year. Also, don't forget that now would be a great time to plan and execute little projects around your house or apartment to keep you engaged, active and feeling like you're accomplishing something and making progress.

4. Continue to eat and move in healthy, self-supporting ways. If there is a way of eating (including avoiding substances) and movement that you know supports mental health, now is the time to keep doing that as much as you are able. Grocery supplies may look a little strained at times and gyms may be shut down so you may have to get creative. Try out a home-based workout, take a walk through your neighborhood, or try a new/interesting recipe. There are some great websites and apps for you phone that can help.

5. Get out into nature! Very importantly, please remember that social distancing does not mean that you must stay inside 100% of the time (unless, you are currently infected of course.) Nature can be a huge support for your mental health and in boosting your mood. So remember you can still make getting outside a priority, by taking a walk on your local trails, playing a round of golf, and/or jogging around a local lake.

6. Re-frame your brain with new experiences as a chance to do what you can't otherwise do. It's easy to feel despair about COVID-19 and what's going on in the world right now. There is a saying that states "Your focus determines your fate". If you spend much of your time focusing on catastrophic thoughts then it is very likely you will begin to feel hopeless, fearful, angry, sad, etc. I won't diminish the seriousness of it at all, but I do think it's important to balance out our awareness of the gravity of the situation with what we can personally control. For instance, while this situation is less than ideal can you think of some silver linings? What's good and possible in this situation versus what's hard and impossible about it? Ask yourself what are three things that are going right. Then ask yourself what are three challenges that are happening to me today that I can tackle. What can I do today that will bring me joy? What is something I could do to help bring someone else joy? Re-framing your thoughts to think about what you can control allows you to decrease the thoughts that may cause negative feelings.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The more we can train our brain to reframe situations and look for the positive, the more we can help to decrease the symptoms of depression and anxiety that may arise during times like these. I hope you found this newsletter helpful as you navigate through these uncharted times. These are extraordinary times, but we humans are remarkably resilient and adaptable. For each of us how we manage through this will look different than the next, but I challenge you to find what brings you joy and do those things. I would like to leave you with a few more ideas you can use in the coming days/weeks.

- You could use this time to give your house that deep clean you've always wanted or complete some honey-do projects.
- This could be your one and only chance to binge watch a series on Netflix you want from beginning to end—make yourself comfortable, grab some snacks, and dive in.
- Take time to journal- the good, the bad, and the ugly write it ALL down. How did you tackle a challenge today? What went right today? What are your plans for tomorrow? Who did you connect with today? In a year from now you can reflect on how much progress you made and how you used this time.
- Each day think of one thing that made you happy and write it down where it will be visible. This allows you to build a list of the positives in your life that can be difficult to find in hard times.
- Then think of something each day that made you sad. Finding the positives is important but it is also important to acknowledge the hard times too. By recognizing what makes us sad we are able to build a plan to conquer that sadness in the future.
- With each of these I encourage you to share them with someone close to you and have them share theirs. This allows you an opportunity to share in each other's joy and help navigate the sad together.

## WHAT IS SENIOR LIFE SOLUTIONS?

Senior Life Solutions, an intensive outpatient group therapy program, is designed to meet the unique needs of individuals typically ages 65 and older struggling with depression and anxiety often related to aging.

If you or someone you know has experienced any of the following we can help:

- Recently experienced a traumatic event
- Loss of spouse or close family member
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Changes in appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of sadness or grief lasting more than two weeks
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness

### TO LEARN MORE YOU CAN CONTACT US AT

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