



SPENDING THE QUARANTINE ALONE

Due to the current coronavirus crisis, we have been mandated to be on a prolonged quarantine to ensure our health and the safety of those around us. Due to this, we no longer have access to our support network in the same way we did before.

Our relationships are a fundamental source of identity, self-esteem, and satisfaction; a fundamental part of our emotional wellbeing and a basic human need.

During the quarantine, we all face a myriad of worries, such as the fear of being infected with the virus, losing someone we love, financial instability, how long the situation will last, dealing with constant frustration and boredom... Nevertheless, due to the afore-mentioned reasons, the impact of isolation may be more severe in people who live alone, generating more intense symptoms such as feeling vulnerable, restlessness, irritability, apathy, sadness, anxiety, or insomnia.

This does not necessarily mean that anyone living alone will experience extreme negative reactions. Loneliness is a subjective feeling, and it is not always dependent on being around others. However, it is important to be more mindful of how being on quarantine may affect those who live alone.

To maintain your psychological wellbeing during the isolation period, you can try the following resources:

1. Observe your Feelings:

Monitoring our mood is a powerful way to gain self-awareness and be able to take better care of yourself. When we notice our mood changing, we are better

equipped to deal with it. To work on this, we can keep a diary in which we register how our mood is each day, and to what situations and thoughts we attribute it. Also, to better understand ourselves, writing is a great way to handle and process our emotions better.

During extreme situations, such as the one we are currently in, it is perfectly natural to feel things that stray from our usual experiences. While being quarantined, we have to normalize the range of emotions to a certain extent and calmly accept there will be times in which we will feel negatively. It is important to think about all the challenging experiences we have successfully navigated in the past, even when there were intense negative emotions associated with them. It is an excellent moment to remember all the tools we used in the past that proved to be effective to cope and put them to use.

2. Taking a Step Back and Accept the Things that Escape our Control:

The conditions of social isolation due to the quarantine are incredibly strenuous. However, we must keep in mind that this situation is only temporary. Although we might not know exactly how many days it will last, we do know it will not be indefinite.

Besides, reminding ourselves that we are all in the same boat will make us feel less isolated. When we join in clapping daily at 20:00 to honor essential workers, go grocery shopping, observe everyone striving to respect the security measures, or see our neighbors looking out to the empty streets from their windows, we remember we are in this together. It is easy to feel lonely after not having interacted with anyone in person for a lengthy period. The reality is, however, that we are not truly isolated but surrounded by people in the same situation.

Lastly, to be fully equipped to deal with stressful situations, we should avoid constantly worrying about what might happen tomorrow. When we have little to no control over a situation, it is preferable to have our emotional resources available to deal with what is going on in the present moment rather than focusing our attention on possible future scenarios. The only thing we can control at present is how we deal with this crisis at home, staying calm, and taking care of

ourselves to the best of our ability. You will be coping far better when you take it day by day than when you are spending all your energy trying to control the uncontrollable.

3. Maintain a Routine, without Being Too Strict:

To handle the quarantine healthily, we can strive to maintain our regular day-to-day routines. Try to keep a healthy sleep schedule, eat at your usual times, keep your usual grooming routine, get dressed, do some exercise... To combat the adverse effects of isolation, it is crucial to avoid inactivity and plan to do daily tasks and activities that allow us to function normally. To have a healthy and balanced schedule, you must include rest, work, and leisure activities. Having a routine helps us regain a sense of control and calmness at an uncertain time.

However, despite the importance of having some structure, we must avoid being too rigid. Setting unreachable goals for this quarantine or expect ourselves to use every moment of it being productive can also put unnecessary strain on us.

4. Adapt Your Free Time to the Current Situation:

As we mentioned, it is essential to dedicate time for leisure and relaxation activities that help us focus on the present moment and unwind. You can make a list of every activity you enjoy and find relaxing that is compatible with staying at home. We are lucky to have access to an endless amount of books, movies, music, and art that can make time fly. However, we have to avoid mindlessly abusing repetitive tasks that are not too rewarding and, instead, focus our full attention on whatever we are engaging in.

When we cannot practice our usual activities and roles, there is a sense of identity loss and self-worth. That is one important reason to continue engaging in the things that matter to us. We can ask ourselves, "What activities are crucial to me, and how can I practice them from home?"

During the quarantine, many of us are joining online group workout sessions, dance classes, or meditation daily. We can also seek online platforms that focus

on our hobbies and passions and exchange our knowledge about the things we love with others. It is also an excellent time to join an online class. The offer is endless: painting, writing, yoga, cooking... These are just some examples of how we can stay connected to our favorite activities and interact with others.

Another important step to cope with being quarantined is finding time to disconnect and unwind. To do so, we can avoid the constant influx of emails and messages by dedicating a time of day in which we set our phones and laptops aside and establishing a time after which we stop our work for the day. We also recommend avoiding checking the news regularly, not to be overwhelmed by negative information. We can stay informed without being bombarded with data by seeing the news once a day.

5. Socialize (online):

The cornerstone of dealing with being confined in isolation is to reach out to our support system frequently. Although socializing through a screen is not the same as in-person, video calling is a great tool to interact as often as we feel like it.

There are numerous ways to get close to our loved ones through different video call portals. We have to keep in mind that it is always preferable to video call someone (which allows for face-to-face contact) than to send a text. We have to dedicate more time to profound conversations that create a feeling of genuine connection to the other person than WhatsApp group chat messaging. Not every form of interaction is equally fulfilling.

Some ideas on how to socialize online are to meet our friends or family through a group video chat while we eat or have a drink, talk about our day, play games, share music, discuss the newest episode of our favorite TV series... Alternatively, we can have a daily call with those who we miss the most.

Finding ways to be selfless with our neighbors and those around us can also be a superb way to feel connected and improve our self-worth. There are many ways to cooperate during this crisis that bring us closer and remind us we are all essential parts of our environment.

6. Ask for Help:

If, after trying to use your coping tools and the advice on this list, you still feel unable to function appropriately or emotionally overwhelmed, it is time to seek out help. Every mental health professional is still working daily from home through video chat platforms. You can find the support you need even if we are all quarantined!

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