



RUTH DINES
THERAPY & TRAINING

therapy@ruthdines.com

07973-666551

CareMail 14

Loneliness

"Loneliness is the deep pain in the chest of modern life"

Douglas Abrams - The Book of Joy

Many of us feel lonely from time to time, it's normal, and these short-term feelings shouldn't harm our mental health. However, the longer the pandemic goes on for, prolonging both the worry about catching the virus and the thought of going through yet another lockdown, the more these feelings of loneliness can become entrenched and possibly lead to increased anxiety, stress and depression.

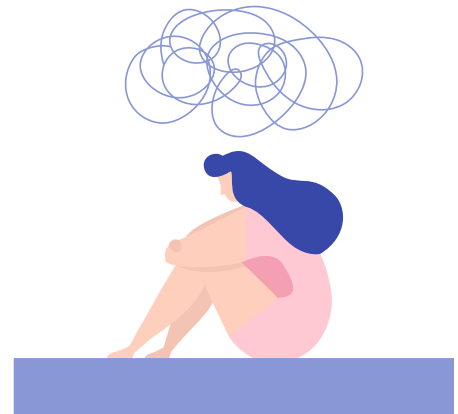
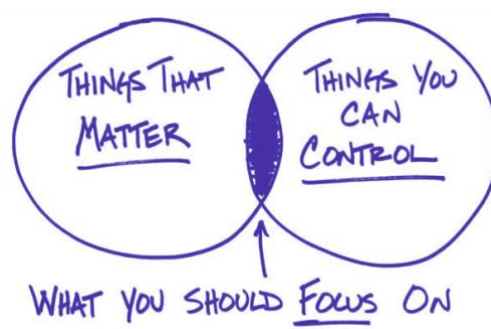
There are, of course, various hues of loneliness, ranging from missing our family because we are in a different household, to the feelings of loss and grief when a loved one has died.

Given we are born wired to connect we need to feel the warmth of common humanity, so a lack of physical contact, the hunger to touch another human, can be so strong an ache that if not met can cause us to feel flat, anxious and depressed. Whether you are lonely through loss, or not having your life peopled in the way you want, the feelings can often be the same, anger, despair, sadness, frustration and envy. But these emotional reactions are a normal response to loss and loneliness, so acknowledging them rather than suppressing them will, in the long run, be better for your mental health.

On a positive note, we must not underestimate our ability to adapt to new situations and find opportunities for growth and happiness even in these uncertain and challenging times.

So, as a reminder from previous CareMails here are some ways of thinking that might help you:

- Accept the reality of what you can't control
- Focus on what you can do!!!
- Realise much of life is unpredictable
- Try and ensure you are as flexible as possible with your needs and expectations of yourself and others. This adaptable mindset will make it easier for you to deal with what life throws at you.
- Be kind and compassionate to yourself. Accept certain days you may feel down and lethargic and acknowledge the feelings. Once you have allowed the feelings in, you can then move on and distract yourself. The list below is certainly not exhaustive, but there are enough ideas in there to keep you busy for a period of time each and every day of the week. And whilst there maybe 7 days in the week, I always like to deliver more than expected, so I have given you an extra days' worth of ideas (you're welcome).



Ideas to combat loneliness and being on your own:

Different things work for different people, so try to find what works for you, and seek further support if you feel you need it.

1. Walking Day

Why walking will make you feel happier & feel less alone:

We have probably never needed nature in the way we do now, especially with the shorter and darker days. As Virginia Sturm, Associate professor, Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of California San Francisco writes “Walking helps us to shift our energy and attention outwards instead of inwards which can lead to significant improvements in emotional wellbeing”

Walking helps ward off negative feelings and reduces stress levels. And connecting with nature is not the only connection you may make on your travels. Walking around your neighbourhood and discovering new places and hidden pockets you never knew existed, means being around other people which can help us regain a sense of belonging.

And for an added boost try smiling at your fellow walkers and neighbours. Research has shown that the simple act of smiling for as little as twenty seconds can trigger positive emotions, jump starting joy and happiness.

Smiling stimulates the release of neuropeptides that work towards fighting off stress and unleashes a feel good cocktail of the neurotransmitters serotonin (natural antidepressant), dopamine (stimulant) and endorphins (natural painkillers).

Smiling also seems to reward the brains of those who see us smiling, making them feel better too.

Smiling at strangers and making that first connection might be hard if you are more introverted or shy, but stepping out of your comfort zone is a great way to grow. So, give it a go, what have you got to lose?



2. Volunteering Day

When researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness, they found the more people volunteered, the happier they were.

For many different reasons, now more than ever people need people. Whilst we may have to socially distance, we can (at this time of writing) meet up with others.

In 1943, Maslow released his ground breaking research that we now know as the “Hierarchy of Needs”. In it, he hypothesized that after safety, the thing that people need most is “Emotional Belonging”. Humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance among their social groups, regardless if these groups are large or small.

Spending time volunteering creates bonds with fellow volunteers, the people you are supporting those in the organization. The social bonds created during volunteering contribute directly to feelings of belonging. For many volunteers, the benefits are social – it’s a way of getting involved in your local community. The more voluntary work you do, the more people you’ll get to meet. It’s the perfect way to meet like-minded friends. What’s more, social support helps recovery following a heart attack or other heart event - British Heart Foundation Blog 20th June 2019.

“We must cultivate the science of human relationships – the ability of all people, of all kinds, to live together and work together.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

3. Gratitude Day

Have a day where you do something just for yourself; a bubble bath, prepare a lovely meal, read that book you’ve been meaning to start, watch a movie with a treat to eat, do a jigsaw puzzle, or learn something new (see next point). And then be grateful for what you did. Write it down so you can savour the moment, and when you are having a bad day look back on what you wrote so you can remember your feelings of gratitude at that time.

4. Learning Day

YouTube, Podcasts, Ted Talks, Online courses and Apps galore to help you learn something new. The variety is infinite and there is something for everyone.

Learn a new hobby:

- Yoga with Adriene (YouTube)
- Cooking (Various blogs, YouTube tutorials, Netflix shows)
- Clean my space (YouTube)
- The Home Edit show (Netflix)

Learn a new language:

- Apps (Memrise, Duolingo etc)
- Foreign language shows/ films (Netflix)

Learn to be more creative:

- Painting (Udemy)
- Colouring books
- Photography
- Make up (YouTube)
- Home DIY
- Gardening
- Reading (Gutenberg)

Learn a new professional skill:

- Management skills (Udemy online courses)
- Coding (Codecademy)
- Life transforming skills (Coursera online courses)



5. Physical Wellbeing Day

One of the most effective ways to fight loneliness and depression is through activities that involve physical exercise. Exercise causes our body to release endorphins, which can improve mood and interact with receptors in the brain that reduce our perception of pain.

It’s also one of the best ways to manage those anxious, ruminating or sad thoughts. Yoga, fitness, exercise classes, martial arts, golf, tennis, swimming. If you can’t get out then you can join a class on Zoom via the internet (ok ok, I know not golf or swimming but all the rest you can!)

If you can walk/exercise with other people then that’s a perfect marriage of fitness and friendship to reduce those feelings of loneliness. Join a running club, cycling group, walking group, or meet with others for a walking tour of your City’s historical and cultural attractions. And if you can’t go out then there are lots of virtual tours available from the comfort of your own home. This is just one of many I found that offer virtual tours of London’s different sites.

<https://www.walks.com/london-virtual-tours/>



6. Writing Day

Write a letter to someone you have lost touch with, pen a poem to let a friend or family member know how you feel about them, or put your thoughts down in a journal. Writing down difficult or sad thoughts will release them from ruminating in your head and affecting your body. Writing down the positive feelings and happy thoughts you have had will help you to remember and savour them for longer.



7. Accomplishment Day

Clear out old cupboards or drawers, sort out your mountain of paperwork or clear the garage/spare room. Clutter can have a huge impact on our energy levels. As Helen Sanderson writes in the Belfast Times this week “There's no question a good tidy-up can be good for the soul. Restoring calm to our surroundings means a calmer mind, freeing us from the disorder that can clutter and clog our brains as much as our rooms”.

I thought her website looked quite interesting <https://helensanderson.com/blog/> and she also sells a declutter kit which is worth checking out if the mood takes you! www.homedeclutterkit.com

8. Relationship Day

It is possible to alleviate loneliness by reaching out and connecting with other people. And in these times of social distancing you can still touch someone with your kindness and consideration.

Government guidelines permitting, why not put your mask on, keep your social distance and visit a friend or neighbour, or someone you know who is also lonely. This is a double dose of goodness as you feel better because you are connecting, and you are also making others feel good too.

If meeting others is not possible, then keeping a physical distance doesn't mean we have to also keep an emotional one. Phone a friend, beat the gloom with a Zoom, Skype, Facetime, whatever works for you in these difficult times. It may not be meeting up, but all of the above options provide some level of contact and closeness.



Thought for the Day

Who would have thought this time last year that the only way you could visit a bank was by wearing a mask covering most of your face!

Shared Space

I am feeling sad and bereft as Coco my cocker spaniel has sadly passed away. I wanted to share with you these wonderful photos taken by Yoko Kikuchi of her white Shiba whose cheekiness and sassiness makes me laugh every time I look at them. What a personality!!



References

- <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-coronavirus-4799661>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/loneliness-during-coronavirus>
- <https://blog.hurusa.com/5-ways-to-help-seniors-alleviate-loneliness>
- <https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/living-alone-lockdown>
- <https://nesslabs.com/loneliness-solitude>
- <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/when-you-start-enjoy-being-alone-these-10-things-will-happen.html>
- <https://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/about-us/news/blogs/volunteering-makes-you-happy>
- <https://blog.movingworlds.org/volunteering-makes-you-happier/>
- The Times (Weekend Section) - Saturday September 12th & 26th 2020
- The Positive Power of Negative Emotions - Dr Tim Lomas
- The Book of Joy – Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu