COVID-19 - Coping with Social Distancing

News Release

Social distancing is a term that has very quickly become part of our daily life and keeping a safe distance from others by staying at home or avoiding gathering in groups in public spaces is vital in stemming the spread of Coronavirus.

However, spending days or weeks at home with limited resources, stimulation and social contact can have a devastating impact on a person's mental health.

With the number of COVID-19 cases significantly exceeding expected Government mortality rates, many psychologists are offering insights on how to separate yourself from others, while still getting the social support you need.

We have gathered together a summary of the research that has been carried out on social distancing, quarantine and isolation, as well as recommendations on how people can cope with these measures.

What to Expect

Due the Government's current lockdown restrictions many people will likely be cut off from their regular routines for an uncertain period of time.

Common sources of stress during this period include a drop in meaningful activities, sensory stimuli and social engagement; financial strain if they are unable to work; and a lack of access to typical coping strategies such as going to the gym or attending religious services.

Psychologists' research has found that during a period of social distancing, quarantine or isolation, some people may experience:

Fear and anxiety

They may feel anxious or worried about contracting or members of their family contracting COVID-19, or spreading it to others. It is also normal to have concerns about obtaining food and personal supplies, taking time off work, or fulfilling family care obligations. Some people may have trouble sleeping or focusing on daily tasks.

Depression and boredom

A hiatus from work and other meaningful activities interrupts a persons' daily routine and may result in feelings of sadness or low mood. Extended periods of time spent at home can also cause feelings of boredom and loneliness.

Anger, frustration or irritability

The loss of agency and personal freedom associated with isolation and quarantine can often feel frustrating. Some may also experience anger or resentment toward those who have issued quarantine or isolation orders or if they feel they were exposed to the virus because of another person's negligence.

Stigmatisation

If you are sick or have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, you may feel stigmatised by others who fear they will contract the illness if they interact with you.

Vulnerable Populations

Older adults, people with pre-existing mental health conditions and health-care workers helping with the response to the coronavirus may have an increased risk of experiencing psychological distress when they engage in social distancing, quarantine or isolation.

People with disabilities who require specialised diets, medical supplies, assistance from caregivers and other accommodations are also at risk for psychological challenges during a pandemic because of the increased difficulties in receiving the care they require.

How to Cope

Fortunately, the research also points to ways to manage these difficult conditions.

Limit news consumption to reliable sources

It is important to obtain accurate and timely public health information regarding COVID-19, but too much exposure to media coverage of the virus can lead to increased feelings of fear and anxiety. Psychologists recommend balancing time spent on news and social media with other activities unrelated to quarantine or isolation, such as reading, listening to music or learning a new language.

Create and follow a daily routine

Maintaining a daily routine can help both adults and children preserve a sense of order and purpose in their lives despite the unfamiliarity of isolation and quarantine. Try to include regular daily activities, such as work, exercise or learning, even if they must be executed remotely. Integrate other healthy pastimes as needed.

Stay virtually connected with others

Face-to-face interactions may be limited, but psychologists suggest using phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media to access social support networks. If someone is feeling sad or anxious, they can use these conversations as an opportunity to discuss their experience and associated emotions. Reaching out to those who are in a similar situation can also help. Facebook groups have already formed to facilitate communication and support among individuals asked to quarantine.

Relying on pets for emotional support is another way to stay connected.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Getting enough sleep, eat well and exercise while at home is vital. Avoid using alcohol or prescription drugs as a way to cope with the stresses of isolation and quarantine.

Use psychological strategies to manage stress and stay positive

A person can examine their worries and aim to be realistic in their assessment of the actual concern as well as their ability to cope. Try not to catastrophise; instead focus on what they can do and accept the things they can't change.

Focussing on the altruistic reasons for social distancing, quarantine or isolation can also help mitigate psychological distress.

Remember that by taking such measures, you are reducing the possibility of transmitting COVID-19 and protecting those who are most vulnerable.

If you are struggling with self-isolation, you might find the following organisations a useful port of call:

- www.mind.org.uk
- www.campaigntoendloneliness.org
- www.samaritans.org.uk

Furthermore, we are always available for a virtual meeting or cup of tea.

Source: https://www.apa.org/

Linea Group