

COPING WITH “SOCIAL DISTANCING” AND “SELF-ISOLATION”

Just the term “self-isolation” and “social distancing” can sound scary: *All on my own with no one to connect to, to care about me?* It can sound like being locked in a box with the key thrown away, or just another wall.

And there is something about the sense of needing to be in distanced and “in isolation”, of being holed up until the danger passes that is inherently scary. It tells us that there *is* danger to be avoided. Danger that could harm us or others. On top of this, the situation is sweeping our society into a certain level of chaos and sudden change. This is very unsettling and destabilising. Things can feel a little weird and surreal. That is the nature of a time like this.

So what does it really mean?

What we are doing is keeping our germs to ourselves and avoiding other people’s germs. We are helping the community to weather a storm. We are staying at home, going for walks in the neighbourhood, doing just the necessary shopping, ordering things to come to us, washing our hands, keeping more physical distance.

Things are different, they will feel different, but all of us are together in this strange new boat, getting to know its shape and edges and how we can fit together here. But we are still living side by side, on streets that link us, with technology to bridge big distances. We still belong to ourselves and each other and the world. And we can ring for help or leave the house as needed – being sure to follow current government directives.

We are still connected: we are connected to the people who love us or whom we love and care about – we can feel it in our hearts and hopefully we can ring them or talk by video link. We are still surrounded by the animals, the trees, the belongings that are near. We still have neighbours. We still have people with us if we live with others.

So that’s the big picture. Here is a bit of nitty gritty, some practical things that might help.

A FEW TIPS

Focus on what you can do, not what you can’t

- Keep in touch with others by phone or video link – if you are not going out as much as you were.
- Who are the people you can still catch up with in person?
- What services can you access online? (Take-away delivery, online shopping, communities, groups)
- Cabin fever? Get outside. Go for a walk.
- Focus on the small pleasures of life.

Limit your intake of scary news and increase the good

- How much news is helpful? Twice daily updates? Helpful is usually what helps you feel oriented and settled to what is happening. Too much is what makes you anxious or overwhelmed.
- What sources give you good news of people being brave, creative, funny about how they deal with this? YouTube and some other social media sites have some lovely stories about the ways that humans are being creative during this time. ABC radio is doing a lot to share good news stories.
- Talk about normal stuff! Ring a friend and talk about good times, the TV show you are watching, anything but the virus – just for a while.

Consider who you want to be with this

Viktor Frankl is famous for saying: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

What matters most to you about how you respond to this time? Eg. With kindness, courage, generosity, stoicism, humour, etc..?

- What are some actions you can take that demonstrate these qualities?
- What has helped you through other hard times and can be useful and healthy now?

Look for the opportunities

“The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger--but recognize the opportunity.” — **John F. Kennedy**

It is easy to focus on what is being lost, what is scary, but we can also take some charge and say: “What are the opportunities here?”

- What is something you have wanted to learn or do that you can do from home? Online course? DIY home fix-it? That art or writing project that you never got around to? A skill that you could improve or develop (juggling, painting, writing, woodwork.....)? Books you have wanted to read? A whole series of your favourite TV show you want to delve into?

None of this is to suggest that this will make the time easy, as if it were just a great holiday. There are ways in which this is just hard. There will be people you long to see and be close to and you may not be able to. There will be times when you may feel stir-crazy or lonely or confused or just all tangled up. That is ok, that is how tough times go and each of us find our way through the best we can.

But by choosing how you want to deal with this time minute by minute as it unfolds, by finding things that help make this time feel manageable and meaningful you can make your stronger. And by knowing that it will pass and maybe through it something good can come – for yourself and for others – can help ride it out and give you pride in how you handled it.

RESOURCES

Help to calm? There are lots of free online calming meditations. Check out google. The ABC Listen app is also posting weekly meditations.

Want to continue your yoga journey? Try out some online classes. Yoga studios around Canberra are putting their classes online. And there is plenty on YouTube.

What about art therapy? There are classes online and people to connect with. So many teachers all over the world are giving free resources at this time. Social media, YouTube, Google...

What about the bigger meaning questions? There are lots of teachers with free supports. Rick Hanson has very practical resources that help with the bigger picture. If you have a religion or a philosophical tradition that you are interested in or connected to, Google it and see what is available.

Follow your own interests: Google them! See who and what is out there. Communities online are here for us at this time. Be careful, of course, follow that online caution around personal details, but don't be afraid to find out what is there.

OR – ask someone you know who might know about resources that you seek and see where it leads you.

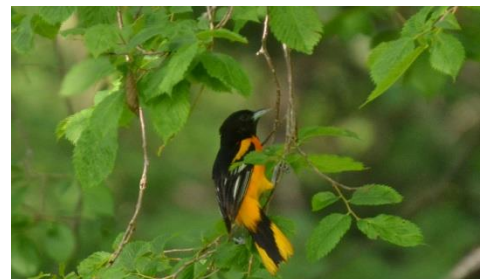
May this time of hardship also be one of growth and learning and opportunity for us all.

Warm wishes,

Spiritual Support Services, UCH



NOTE: Specific resource suggestions are not endorsed by CHS and are to be used as they fit with your treatment plan.



ACT
Government

**Canberra Health
Services**