

Social distancing for the social animal

Aristotle wrote “Man is by nature a social animal.” Since that time, scientists have confirmed that humans are indeed social animals. Our brains are wired to be social.

Therefore, when we are called upon to engage in “social distancing” during the coronavirus pandemic, it’s not our nature to do so. What, then, does it mean to “socially distance”? Does it mean not going to parties? Not going on a date or taking a trip? Concrete guidelines can answer these questions. Below are links to help you guide your “social distancing” behavior.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:
store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf

What about social isolation?

To control this pandemic, we must “social distance.” This can make us feel lonely. The people who are most at risk of contracting coronavirus - those older than 60 and those with preexisting conditions - are also those who are more likely to feel lonely already. However, all of us face loneliness as we practice social distancing.

Isolation and loneliness are significant mental health challenges. We need to take care of both our mental and physical health. Here are some tips to help you stay connected and fight isolation during this public health emergency.

1. **Reduce your own risk.** If you’re young and healthy, take recommended health precautions seriously. Young people are some of the highest risk for transmitting the virus to others. Wash your hands frequently; stay away from crowded public spaces (keep a distance of six feet between you and others); and leave the house only when necessary.



2. **Get together outdoors and not in tight crowded spaces.** Take a walk in the park or the woods. Do not go to a movie or eat in a restaurant. Be sure to check with your community’s guidance as some areas are advising against this type of activity.
3. **Virtual connection.** During times like these, virtual connection is critical. For people who are not familiar with technology, be sure to provide needed technical support. Use technology such as video chat or FaceTime. Share dinner that way or have a virtual book club meeting.
4. **Be proactive about staying in touch.** Sometimes we need to remind ourselves to make that telephone call, text, or video chat. Now may be the best time to reach out to that long-lost friend.
5. **Keep yourself busy.** If you have a project to focus on, you have less time to think about your social isolation. Is there a project around the house you’ve been meaning to do, such as clean out the garage? How about Sudoku, a crossword, or a puzzle?
6. **Limit media overload.** Too much news about the coronavirus can make us feel even more isolated. Watch a movie or read a book to feel connected to others.

If you need other ideas or assistance finding a behavioral health provider to help you manage your feelings, call CTBHP at 1-877-552-8247, or look for a behavioral health provider on the CTBHP website at <http://www.ctbhp.com/members/mbr-findprv.html> You can also contact the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration’s Disaster Distress Helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/2k19/substance-abuse-mental-health-disaster-distress-helpline) at 1-800-985-5990. This is, a 24/7, 365 days-a-year, national hotline. It provides immediate crisis counseling. It is toll-free, multilingual, and confidential.