

Social connection during physical distancing

Social connection is considered a fundamental human need. Social isolation can be described as lacking social contact, while loneliness can describe a lack of fulfilling social relationships. In a time of physical distancing and sheltering in place, feelings of loneliness can arise in new, unique, and challenging ways. Social isolation and loneliness can manifest in emotional and physical pain, including depression, anxiety, poor sleep, and difficulty getting tasks done. While it may be difficult to increase social contact or have social contact in the way we are used to, we can impact our feelings of loneliness by changing how we use the contact we are able to have and improving the relationships we have and the support we exchange.

What makes a great relationship?

- **Mutuality:** the ability to be mutually empathetic, mutually involved, and mutually willing to impact and be impacted
- **Authenticity:** the ability to express feelings, experiences, and thoughts with an awareness of impact on the other person
- **Empowerment:** the ability to act and have a sense of personal strength
- **Positive Conflict:** the ability to discuss and process difference in the relationship

What does a great relationship do for me?

Great relationships help us to feel more energized, self-aware, self-confident, and able to act, as well as more connected and more motivated to connect further with others. Great relationships also provide support during stressful times and increase resiliency.

How do I work towards improving my relationships from far away?

- Check-in with your loved ones! When sheltered in place, we may forget to check-in with our loved ones. Sometimes, our loved ones who most need support are most uncertain about how to reach out. If you haven't heard from someone in a while, reach out.
- Reflect on which of the aspects of a good relationship listed above could be improved in your relationships and explore how you might make those improvements.
- Increase your awareness of how you want to be supported and want to communicate. When you reach out for help, do you want advice? Do you simply want someone to listen? Would you like for them to share if they've had a similar experience?
- Use this as an opportunity to be open with your thoughts and feelings. Your friends, family, partners, etc. may not be able to notice how you're feeling in the ways they usually might. You may need to express your feelings more clearly and concretely.
- Many things can get lost in translation, whether via text, messenger, phone call, or video chat. If our needs are not being met, this may be because the other person did not understand what was needed to meet those needs. Be clear when you ask for what you want and do not want.
- Mistakes can be made. If mistakes and misunderstandings happen, provide authentic, empathic feedback and remain open to receiving feedback in turn.