

UW Health: Combatting social isolation and loneliness is key to well-being this holiday season

Posted on Friday, Dec 4, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Madison—People who are single and/or living alone are facing unique challenges during the pandemic. Being cut off from regular in-person interactions for many months can take an emotional toll on our well-being and result in significant health implications.

A 2017 systematic review of 40 studies published in the journal *Public Health* found a significant association between social isolation and loneliness and poorer mental health outcomes and increased all-cause mortality. Research has also found that loneliness and poor social connection cause inflammation and chronic disease.

According to UW Health psychologist Shilagh Mirgain, people who live alone need to be intentional about how they spend their time during the upcoming holidays and long winter months by prioritizing social connection. Here are some ways to cope to combat loneliness and the holiday blues safely, especially if you are living alone during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Emotional Fitness:** Prioritize taking care of yourself. Sleep well, eat healthy foods, get regular exercise, manage your stress through relaxation practices, keep a regular schedule, cultivate your joy and have healthy distractions when there is downtime.
2. **Active Solitude:** Use this opportunity to explore and deepen your connection to yourself and reflect on the direction of your life. In the space of solitude and quiet there is a chance for you to listen to your own voice and discover who you really are and what you want your life to be about, which can enhance all your relationships in new ways.

3. **Nurture Relationships:** Take the initiative and reach out to people in your support network. Stay connected to those people who are important to you and plan for who you are going to connect with. Send notes of appreciation or holiday cards to people you care about or arrange for a socially distanced walk.
4. **Be Kind to Yourself.** Offer yourself care and kindness through comforting rituals, like listening to pleasurable music, taking a bubble bath, wrapping up in a warm blanket, watching your favorite holiday movie, lighting a scented candle, drinking a warm cup of tea, or reading your favorite book.
5. **Meaning and mastery:** Create meaning by giving to others, helping someone in need, or donating your time or resources to a cause you believe in. Work towards a goal that will give you a sense of mastery and accomplishment.
6. **Play by Your Own Rules:** Give yourself permission to do whatever you want this holiday. Pick activities that will make it more fun, create a new tradition, and figure out who you want to connect with and in what way.
7. **Know You Are Not Alone:** Reach out for help if you are struggling. If you are experiencing significant depression or anxiety, substance abuse or suicidal ideation, contact your doctor or a behavioral health specialist for support.
8. **Check In on Loved Ones Living Alone:** Leave a holiday gift on their front door, send them a holiday card, reach out and call them and ask them how they are doing and what they need during this time of year. Ask them how you can help, what kind of support they need and how they would like to stay connected with you.

Shilagh Mirgain is available for Zoom interviews between 11:45-1:15 p.m.