Looking out for others when isolated during COVID-19

Support those around you with these simple tips

Social isolation should be considered as physical distancing. While our opportunity to interact face to face is limited, we should not be isolating ourselves from social interactions. We all respond differently when isolated - some people will excel and others will find it difficult, it is important to remember that we are all part of a community. It is our human nature to care for one another and we may also need to turn to others for social and emotional support.

COVID-19 provides us with a need to adapt how we communicate, demonstrate our empathy and acknowledge our own fears and anxiety so that we can get support and help where needed. If you are coping well – remember that there is most likely someone near to you that is not and if you are not coping, there will be people willing to listen and support you.

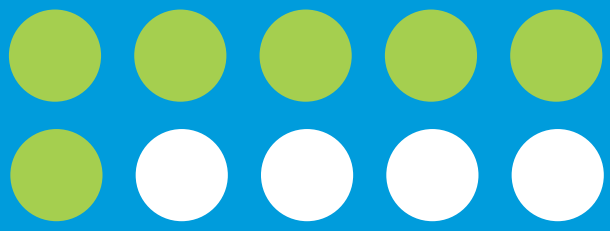
MetLife 360Health has developed some simple tips that may help you support those around you both your team at work, your colleagues and family.

Understanding the challenges

Before solving the issues, we need to acknowledge the challenges:

1. Speed of change – this happened suddenly so our preparedness was limited and our anxiety and fear are amplified – this is normal.
2. Lack of face to face supervision – we thrive on social connections and interpersonal communications in three dimensions and with more than just voice.
3. Access to information – there is a lot of information in the media – bad news sells so we tend to see more of the bad than the good.
4. Interpersonal challenges – using words in email and voice without seeing the non-verbal cues can be challenging.
5. Distractions at home – which can include suboptimal workspaces, unexpected parenting requirements and general anxiety of the unknown.
6. Mental health concerns – there is a real risk in these circumstances that you and the people around you will be at a heightened risk of mental health issues.

6 in 10 state that building relationships is a critical factor for those that rate their health and wellbeing as either 'well' or 'very well'.[1]



Looking out for others

1. Check in regularly – check up on your colleagues if you are at work as well as your family members and friends. These check ins don't necessarily need a purpose.
2. Use different communication channels – emails are common enough but with social distancing, people need to hear voices, see faces and get visual cues to support their mental health. Phone calls are fine but where possible use video conferencing. It is good for you as well as the people you are talking with. Messaging services such as Skype, WhatsApp can be good alternatives for quick messages and sharing updates but don't just rely on them.
3. Set rules of engagement – use social media for social. Encourage family friends and colleagues to not rely on it as their source of truth or media outlet.
4. Set up a social structure – our normal life includes social engagements with colleagues, friends and family. Try to maintain a social structure for you and the people you care about. Set up regular social gathering -virtual coffee, virtual drinks or pizza. More than ever, we need to have fun when possible. There are plenty of free video apps and programs either through your workplace for work interactions or on social media.
5. Listen and offer support – this is critical. With less visual cues, it is important to listen and more important to acknowledge anxiety as normal and empathise with people's situations. Ask how people are, listen to their answer carefully and then restate their answer back to them. If you have any concerns at all – communicate them and ask if they are really ok. Sometimes you will need to ask in more than one way.
6. Understand different situations – while you may still be employed; your colleagues spouse, partner or family member may not and this could be impacting their anxiety levels. They may have children at home requiring attention or they may have a sick relative or friend. Find out what you can and keep a close eye on more vulnerable colleagues. Some of your friends and colleagues will need you more than others – be there for them.
7. Be positive – colleagues and family will pick up quickly on your own verbal and physical cues – if you remain positive it is more likely that they will too. It is also important to remember that if you do get anxious or feel stressed don't hide behind a facade – share your feelings and situation which will make others more willing to share back.

What are the cues I should be looking for?

There are several signs to look out for that could indicate someone is at risk of a mental health condition. See our flyer on understanding the signs for more information on what to look for if you are worried about someone.

Where to get help if you think you need it?

If you, or someone you know needs help and are not coping, here are some links and numbers to contact. Reaching out is winning, it should not be considered defeat:

- **SANE Australia** (people living with a mental illness)
  Phone: 1800 18 7263
- **Beyond Blue** (anyone feeling depressed or anxious)
  Phone: 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- **Black Dog Institute** (people affected by mood disorders)
  Online help
- **Lifeline** (anyone having a personal crisis)
  Phone: 13 11 14 or chat online
- **Suicide Call Back Service** (anyone thinking about suicide)
  Phone: 1300 659 467

360Health provides solutions to help prevent and manage serious illnesses at every stage of your health journey so that you can live healthier for longer. MetLife 360Health, your health partner.

1. MetLife's COVID-19 Insights research, April 2020

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