

CARING FOR YOURSELF DURING LOCKDOWN WHEN YOU ARE OLDER

When we go through a crisis, the first thing we do is recruit the support of our family and friends to act as a lifeline, an anchor. Instructing our elderly to recede from the world, as we are now doing to protect them from Covid-19, feels contrary to everything we know. After all, you are the very people who have acquired a wealth of invaluable life experience. Most of you have raised families of your own, lost people you loved, weathered war, financial collapses and in many cases, faced unspeakable atrocities, like the Holocaust. You are survivors who have overcome challenges and demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout your lives. You are the people we respect and look up to for your wisdom and guidance. Yet now, we are forced to keep you at a distance. We cannot benefit from your knowledge and we have to ask you to be alone.

Having connections with others is a vital part of what keeps us afloat when we feel we are sinking. And even though 80 is often the new 60 and our older generations are often vibrant, energetic and independent, still, at this time, many are isolated and alone - not free to socialise, or engage in sports, cards and outings. **It's not that you're helpless. It's that you're alone.** Your independence feels under threat.

Over the years, there has been a tremendous shift in how the world views older people, and that's because older people, health-permitting, have changed. Nowadays we know you are often independent, aware and informed. This offers a positive shift in power and decision-making that enables you to feel informed, have a voice and be connected to your own lives, each other and your communities. You will also insist on being involved in your own health care decisions and resist being disempowered.

Here are some valuable tips for overcoming isolation that you might like to consider:

1. The children of elderly parents are introducing their mothers and fathers to food-delivery apps and online classes these days. Sometimes these new-age learnings can be little unnerving and intimidating. You may feel forced into a technological age you're not sure you can cope with. But technology can solve so many of our problems at this time. You can play bridge online, have coffee with friends online,

educate yourself by joining all kinds of classes, etc. The possibilities that technology brings in terms of widening access and even using data to deliver more effective care are endless. While we all know that face to face relationships are the ones that are the most rewarding, if you are faced with an opportunity to learn new technotricks, embrace it, as even if it's a new thought paradigm, you will get the hang of it in time and grow to love it, like the younger members of your family do.

2. Keep connected to family and friends. Create a schedule for yourself in which you speak to at least one person a day. You might not be able, or have the capacity, to call every day, but a text message also works.

Making a shared effort is good for everybody's well-being - and you will all feel more connected as a result. If you do not have a smartphone or computer, ask your family if there is a way of just dialling you in on a group call to chat on speakerphone.

3. Sometimes phone conversations can be awkward for small children so when you talk to your grandchildren, talk about fun and distracting things. Ask about their favourite TV shows and books; tell them to send you pictures of what they've been doing at home.

4. Make a list of handy helplines that you may need municipal services, GAP, the CSO, your pharmacist, your doctor, etc. Google other important numbers for your list and ask for help to draw it up if you need it. Stick it on your fridge for easy access.

5. Connect with community organisations, like the Chev, that offer assistance to the elderly. Whether it's volunteers who will shop for you or even just offer some online or telephone companionship, call on them. Remember you are not a bother or burden. There are really people who are desperate to do something worthwhile with their time and help others. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help but a sign of strength that you are utilizing the resources around you.

6. Remain physically active at home. There is always somewhere to walk, even if it's around a small garden or in your flat. Keeping active is vital to stay healthy mentally and physically. If your mobility is limited, chair exercises or pottering around the garden can lift your spirits.

7. Take up a new hobby. If there is a craft you have always fancied trying, now is the time. Perhaps cross-stitch, adult colouring books, or even just a stack of crosswords. Ask those around you to get the materials you need.

8. Look up some self-help anxiety tools. Many of us now have a string of self-help tools for managing stress and anxiety - from meditation and yoga, to breathing exercises or listening to music.

9. Plan for when this will all be over because it is temporary. It may feel endless but it will pass and then you can develop the relationship and skills that you started during lockdown.

If you are reading this article and know someone who could benefit from the information in it, please share it. Go over the 9 steps above and be the person who provides those things that they may need.

