

Combating loneliness when you live alone and work from home

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When you live by yourself and work remotely, loneliness can be a bigger risk. Here's how to stave it off and stay connected.

When the pandemic sent so many people home to work and live in the same space, living alone was already on the rise. [In 2019, 28.4% of U.S. households](#) were single-person, up from 16.7% in 1969. For some, daily interaction in the office was an important form of connection that was suddenly disrupted.

And while living alone doesn't necessarily lead to loneliness, [research from CIGNA](#) indicates that living and working from home can increase the risk of feeling lonely. The company's 2020 "[Loneliness in the Workplace](#)" report found that remote workers report feeling lonelier, especially if they would prefer to be in the office.

Loneliness in general is an issue that concerned former U.S. surgeon general [Dr. Vivek Murthy](#) so much that his new book, [Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World](#), is devoted to the topic. Loneliness is an epidemic that existed even before the pandemic, of course. Murthy not only experienced the feeling himself throughout his life but saw other people suffering after he became a physician. As he traveled around the country and met with people as the U.S. surgeon general, stories of loneliness were often coupled with those of substance abuse disorder, [depression](#), [anxiety](#), and even community violence.

It can be harder to live alone now—and work there too—when so many outlets for connection are cut off due to social distancing and stay-at-home orders or recommendations, Murthy says. The good news is that there are some actions people living alone can take to help manage loneliness. In fact, Murthy says, these actions can help anyone struggling with the issue, whether they live alone or not.

EMBRACE SOLITUDE

Understanding the difference between loneliness and solitude—and establishing more respect for the latter—is a good place to start, Murthy says. Our lives are so busy, and this is an opportunity to truly stop and become more comfortable with being alone. "Solitude is so important because if we've incorporated it into our lives on a regular basis, it can be an opportunity for us to center ourselves and regroup ourselves. It can be a chance to let the noise around us settle and to simply be in the world rather than always 'doing,'" he says.

Establish periods where you choose to be alone without interruption. Work on appreciating the quietness and [the space around you](#). You may start a gratitude practice, [write in a journal](#), read, or choose other activities that you can do on your own and that bring you joy.

BE PRESENT WHEN CONNECTING

Whether you prefer to use videoconferencing for the face time, a phone call, or even written correspondence, set aside at least 15 minutes per day to reach out to someone who matters to you. But such communication only works in fighting loneliness if you're present for it, Murthy says.

"While we're talking to a friend, we might be checking our inbox or refreshing our media feeds. We might be googling questions that pop into our head and have a ball game on in the background. And we tell

ourselves, we can do this and we think we can multitask and technology's awarded us the opportunity to do that," he says. We think of ourselves as being more efficient. But the reality is that we're not truly listening to what the other person is saying and not connecting as fully as we could if we were focused only on the conversation. It's the quality of the connection that matters, he says, so devote yourself fully to the exchange.

MOVE

If you're always at home, it's easy to adopt a sedentary lifestyle. But movement impacts mood, Murthy says. Getting some exercise or finding ways to move more can improve how you feel. Get up throughout the day and stretch. Find ways to exercise and move more. If you can get outside, that can help too. Work on the yard or go for a walk while you take some of your work calls, if possible.

Some people are combining social and physical activity, Murthy says. Even when people can't go to the gym, he says some people are working out virtually with friends or even hosting virtual dance parties, which can combine fun and exercise.

ENGAGE IN ACTS OF SERVICE

[Charitable activities or acts of service](#) that benefit others also make us feel better and allow us to connect with others. And while we may typically think of acts of service as volunteering in a soup kitchen or building houses with Habitat for Humanity, there are many other things we can do, even while social distancing, Murthy says.

Check in on an older neighbor who might be worried about going to the grocery store and offer to pick up some things they need. If you have a friend who's at home with children, offer to "virtually babysit" for a while. Read the children a story or otherwise keep them occupied via video for a short time so your friend can relax a bit (while still watching the children, of course). Your community may need volunteers to deliver meals to home-bound seniors or families whose children get free or reduced-price lunches at school.

"We're all in boats of different sizes, but we're all in the same storm. And we're trying to figure out how to make sense of our lives, which have been turned upside down. When we recognize that, we will see that there are many opportunities for us to serve," he says.

Murthy points out that, regardless of what someone's social media feed looks like (even the [watercolor painters and bread bakers](#)), this is a difficult time, and we're all figuring it out. Looking for ways to effectively combat loneliness and improve how we interact with our loved ones and others, "we can strengthen our connection and, hopefully, come out of the pandemic more deeply connected to each other, healthier, and more resilient than before," he says.