

## Social Distancing Does Not Have to Mean Social Isolation

As the hands of time continue to turn and we continue to navigate uncharted waters in our response to COVID-19, the main focus during this pandemic has been on physical health. Of course, it is of utmost importance to take care of your physical health by abiding by the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), but this has many people questioning, “What about mental health?”

“Mental health and physical health are married and can never get a divorce,” notes Dr. Tracie Pasold, a psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology at Marywood University. She adds, “They will always be influencing each other. If we are not psychologically healthy, we place our physical health at risk, and vice versa.”

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), one in five adults in America—that’s 46.6 million people—have a mental illness. In the current pandemic crisis, the incidence of psychological problems is likely much higher. People who have previously been mentally stable are now experiencing considerable stress and anxiety. Furthermore, the emphasis on social distancing can magnify feelings of loneliness and despair.

“Social support is crucial to mental health,” says Tyshawn Thompson, a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology at Marywood University. “Maintaining social support during a time of social distancing can be a challenge, but it is worth the effort,” he adds.

Social distancing does not necessarily mean social isolation, there are many ways to stay connected with others, even mending and reviving old relationships. The Pennsylvania Psychological Association recommends the following:

- Reach out to the people with whom you have had a distant relationship. It is quite likely that they’ll be glad to hear from you, and you’ll have an opportunity to revive or mend your relationship.
- Rather than texting, connect with others through videoconferencing, such as Facetime or Google Hangouts. Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea together as you chat, just as you would at a café or at the park.
- Log onto social media. See what others are up to. Sometimes the content that other people post can be inspiring and soothing; if you feel overwhelmed by negative posts, make an effort to focus on the uplifting posts. Your network of friends on social media can be a support.
- Attend live streaming events that attract your interests. If you’re used to going to a place of worship and they have begun live streaming, plan to attend. If you like animals, zoos and aquariums are live streaming. Musicians are doing free live streamed concerts of their famous hits. These can be fun events for you or you and your family that help

you maintain a feeling of connectedness.

For more information and tips on mental health challenges during the pandemic, see <https://www.papsy.org/page/COVID19>

Disclaimer: The above suggestions are not intended to substitute for professional help. If you are having serious difficulty coping with everyday activities and relationships, contact a psychologist. During this time of social distancing, many psychologists are working with people remotely via videoconferencing. [Check out PPA's Psychologist Locator to find a psychologist near you.](#)

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Tyshawn Thompson