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counselling • coaching • wellbeing

CONTACT

Cornerstone Counselling
(South West) LLP
28 South Street
Wellington
Somerset
TA21 8NS



01823 765065



contact@cornerstonesw.co.uk



[@cornerstonesw](https://twitter.com/cornerstonesw)

KEEPING MENTALLY HEALTHY DURING ISOLATION

BY NATHAN FOX (MBACP)

We are currently being asked to isolate ourselves and for many people this will be absolutely fine. But for some people this can be a difficult and a triggering time.

The normal advice would be to go out and join a group to make new connections, but this is not possible with covid-19 restrictions.

So, what can we do?

Make sure that you take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to the news, especially social media. The constant reporting about the pandemic can increase anxiety and lead us to catastrophize the worst-case scenario. Remember there is some good news out there, but you might have to go looking for it. Most people are awesome, believe me they are, there are many stories of people doing amazing things to help those in need. Remember humans are basically good.

Take care of you physical self. Make time to stretch, exercise and/or meditate. Try to eat healthy, get plenty of sleep, avoid too much alcohol and drugs. Remember to breathe, slow and steady. When we feel anxious our breathing can speed up and impact heart rate making anxiety worse. Taking deep slow breaths really will help.

Make time to unwind and relax. Try to do some other activities or hobbies you enjoy. Read a book and escape to another world. Listen to music that makes you happy. Dance, yes really, dance. Its amazing for you and you don't have to be good at it.

Connect with other humans. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Join Facebook groups and make some new connections, there are loads of people out there who want to help others get through this time.

Many people who have experienced extreme loneliness have coped with this through keeping their mind busy, however that may be. Some people stretched their mind



with difficult maths problems or learning a new skill. This can be helpful as a distraction technique and can help by promoting feelings of satisfaction and achievement. Maybe if you have always thought I would love to learn a new language or write that book, maybe now is a good time.

The other thing that many people found was anthropomorphising, giving an object or animal human characteristics. Think Tom Hanks and Wilson in castaway. This is a natural part of being human and is totally normal, it is not a sign of madness.

Neither is talking to yourself.

Loneliness is linked to poor mental health and can lead to changes in how the brain works. It can interfere with a range of everyday functioning, such as sleep patterns, attention and logical and verbal reasoning. On a psychological level the brain reacts to isolation as a threat, if I am not part of the group, I am vulnerable. This can lead to stress hormones being released in the brain which will further impact how we think and behave.

But there is good news to all this, in 2018 a US poker player bet \$100,000 he could survive for 30 days alone in a dark room. Even though he had everything he needed to live and be comfortable, he only lasted 20 days.

When he came out he said that the experience had changed him, reporting that he now had a greater appreciation for people and life, better attention and focus, and overall feeling happier than before.

So even in the darkest days there can be a good outcome in the end.

stay safe everyone.

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