

Coronavirus & Living Alone



Simple, practical tips for living alone and supporting people who live alone during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

In this current crisis it's helpful to think about people who are living by themselves or as the only adult at home with children. This may be a senior person in your community who has been by themselves for decades. It may be a sole parent who is frantically trying to stay ahead of home schooling, children's needs, balancing the family budget, or even managing the stresses of shared parenting. It may be a single adult living by his or herself, having moved interstate to take on a new position.

Whilst some people's personalities enable them to be quite self-contained, others may be struggling with loneliness, busyness and stress. Unlike couples or larger families, these people don't have other adult company under the same roof and it can be really isolating, even in normal times, let alone during this unprecedented time of 'stay at home' and self-isolation.

Know someone who is living alone or is the only adult in the house?

Here are some simple and practical tips for reaching out to that person.

Reach out

Call or message them to let them know you're thinking of them and ask how they're doing. This may seem small to you, but it can make a big difference. For someone who spends a lot of time at home in their own company, knowing that someone else is thinking of them is affirming and it provides an opportunity for them to connect. If you can't reach them via phone or technology, drop a card or letter in the mail for them instead. If appropriate you might offer to pray for them.

Listen in order to understand their experience

Listening to someone's story means being willing to take a journey to a place you may not have experienced before. Don't presume you know what it's like for them. Listen well and reflect back to them how it might feel to be in their shoes.

Statements like, "That sounds overwhelming," or "That sounds like you miss your family," show your desire to relate with how they are feeling, which will show you value them. If you don't quite get it, that's OK, too. They'll usually respond with something closer to their experience.

Ask if they have ways to regularly connect with others

Ask if there are other people they are regularly connecting with. If they're not yet connected well, ask if there is someone they feel close to, who they could intentionally reach out to. If they are an older person, who is not familiar with technology, could you help set them up with a device or give them a tutorial on how to use the device they may already have?

If they don't have anyone to connect with, and if you have the capacity to do so, then offer them a regular connection with you. Agree on a time and method to do this and do your best to keep this commitment. If they say, "No thanks," that's OK. If they need to down the track, they'll know they can reach out to you because you made this offer.

Ask, "How else can I support you during this time?"

By asking the person this question, you are inviting them to shape how they'd like to be supported. A sole parent may just love a home cooked meal, prepared for their family by someone who understands their dietary requirements.

The needs will vary from one person to the next, so by asking, you're empowering that person to shape what support they may be able to receive.

Are you living alone or are you the only adult in your household?

If you don't have a spouse or partner or housemate walking this journey with you, it's important to be intentional about staying connected with people who value and encourage you.

Let your friends and loved ones know you'd like to connect more regularly

In an ideal world, you will have been in regular contact with your closest friends and family. But sometimes life's circumstances mean either you've not been connecting, or you don't have close or easily available connections.

Be courageous and intentional and reach out to some people you may have lost contact with. Be open to new invitations from people you feel comfortable with.

Be open and honest with people you trust

It's one thing to make a call or Skype with a friend or group of friends, but it takes courage to let them know this new layer of isolation – staying home, or not being able to go out or be as active – is starting to affect you negatively. Tell them, "I'm finding it tough."

Use your diary and plan new ways of connecting

Book in some weekly or fortnightly connections in the same way as you might book in a weekly gym or exercise session, mothers' group catch-up or church connect group.

During the coronavirus pandemic, this might look like booking in a regular phone chat, or having a 'virtual coffee' over Face Time, or planning your daily or weekly walk with a friend - at a safe distance apart, of course. It could also be joining an online gaming group or creating a one-off online trivia night. Engage your imagination and plan events in your diary to keep up your connections!

Be intentional with self-care

It's important to know the things that bring you joy, that refresh or energise you and that calm your mind. Planning these things into your schedule is vital to your 'self-care.' It's not about being selfish or indulgent, it's about taking responsibility for your wellbeing. Get in some exercise, escape into a book, meditate on God's word, soak in a bath, get creative with cooking or music, explore some online study ... whatever it is that re-energises you, keep these things happening (with modifications, if necessary) so that you are being kind to yourself and balancing the stresses of these new challenges.

Ask yourself, "What other support do I need during this time?"

If you are self-isolating or isolating as a family because someone is vulnerable or sick, some of your basic needs like food and medicines will need to be delivered to you. Be honest with your friends, family and neighbours and let them know your needs. Whilst we often think and plan as individual households, it's important to make your needs known so that, as a community, we can help one another.

If you are noticing that your mental health is declining – for instance, if you are experiencing high anxieties, untamed anger, constantly depressive thoughts or paranoia – it's important that you reach out to ask for help.

Anglicare provide counselling over the phone or via video conferencing. Call 1300 651 728, where a skilled intake worker can help you and let you know more about our services.

Connecting with Jesus

One of the names given to Jesus Christ in the New Testament is Immanuel, which means God with us (Matthew 1:23). While we can feel alone, God promises to always be with us because he sent Jesus Christ into the world.

May He bring you comfort and companionship in this time of loneliness and confusion.

Anglicare Assistance

Anglicare Counselling

anglicare.org.au/what-we-offer/counselling/

1300 651 728

Other Counselling & Helplines

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline

13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

1800 512 348

coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au

Further Information

Health Direct

Loneliness and Mental Health

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/loneliness-isolation-mental-health>

Reach Out

<https://au.reachout.com/everyday-issues/isolation-and-loneliness> helping young people address loneliness

The Conversation

<https://theconversation.com/7-science-based-strategies-to-cope-with-coronavirus-anxiety-133207>