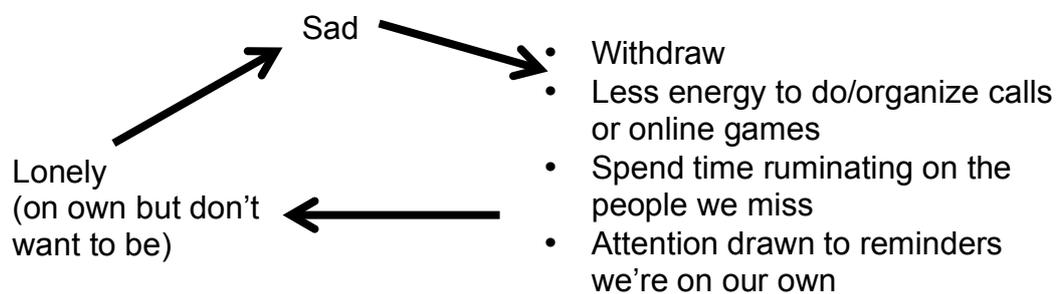


Loneliness and Isolation

Isolation means being on our own. However isolation does not always mean being lonely- it is possible to enjoy isolation, or to find ways of feeling connected even when you are isolated. *Loneliness* however is a feeling of being on our own, when we don't want to be. The being on our own can be physical, but can also be a sense of not being understood or cared for the way we would like. It is possible to feel lonely when you are with other people.

Loneliness can often start a vicious cycle that brings our mood down, as shown in the cycle below:



Usually to manage loneliness we would strive to spend less time on our own, by joining groups or inviting friends round. However, right now those options aren't available to us, but instead we can:

1. *Spend less time on our own (albeit not physically) by using creative and virtual methods of socialising*
2. *Respond differently to the sadness we experience as a result of loneliness so that we at least don't feed the cycle.*

But like everything this is easier said than done, so let's pull this apart some more. Responding differently would mean:



- **Connecting with people instead of withdrawing** – see the section below on creative ways to socialise

- **Organising online meet-ups even though you don't feel motivated to or energetic** – when we are experiencing an unpleasant emotion it is important to respond by 'acting opposite' to what we feel like doing. If you feel like going to bed and doing nothing all evening, don't! Try suggesting a game with a friend instead, or doing some YouTube yoga, or whatever else is active and/or connects you to others.

- **Spending more time doing meaningful things** – A good way to spend less time ruminating is to fill your time up with meaningful activities. Check out your local (or even not so local) museums to see what sort of online events they are holding or if you can go on a ‘virtual tour’. You can Google search for museum virtual tours also. For more ideas on filling your time meaningfully, see our section below with ideas for creative socializing, and also see our guide on ‘*Setting Values Based Goals in Isolation*’.
- **Turning our attention towards helpful things** – There are a few things we can do to refocus our attention:
 - Print or draw out a calendar for the month and stick it somewhere you’ll see it frequently. At the end of every day write what you were grateful for that day onto the correct space on the calendar. When you need to refocus your attention, read your gratitude calendar.
 - Do some mindfulness, even if it is just 30 seconds to 3 minutes (see our guide on the ‘*3-step Mindful Breathing Space*’ in order to turn your attention away from people who aren’t present (and the fact they aren’t present) or worries about the future and towards what is present right here and now for you.
 - Do a really attention-grabbing activity, such as calling someone up and having a conversation where you ask lots of questions about them, or cooking a meal!

Creative and Virtual socializing

First and foremost, have a look at this Facebook group:

‘I’m stuck at home but still want to have fun’

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/783940375464197/>

There is a daily schedule of events and classes posted up, all of which involve interaction with other people online who are looking for connection in this odd time. Events range from meditation, to dance parties and just about everything else in between!



Also, download a video calling app (e.g. Zoom, Skype, Facetime, Microsoft Teams) if you haven’t already, and then start scheduling in calls. Think about who you would normally see in your week and then try to do video call versions of those encounters. Here are some ideas:

1. Eat together

- If you would normally eat lunch with colleagues, do it anyway via video call
- If you and your partner (or best friend!) used to have a ‘date nights’ but aren’t living together, have a video call date. Light

candles, cook something really nice, make cocktails, take it in turns picking music, cosy up and watch a film together via the 'watch together' functions on streaming services.

- If you would usually visit family on the weekends, do Sunday lunch with them, or go for your one hour walk together (over the phone)

2. Play together

- If you're a gamer, use this as an opportunity to socialise. Play games against people you know in the real world instead of on your own against AI or against strangers. Not only will this increase your sense of real-world connectedness through an activity you already enjoy, but having times to 'meet' online will increase structure in your day.
- If you're more old-school, don't worry! There are loads of online board games just Google 'best online board games' for loads of links, lists and reviews!
 - <https://pyx-1.pretendyoure.xyz/zy/game.jsp>
 - <https://www.catan.com/game/catan-universe>
 - <https://www.secrethitler.com/>
- Or go even more traditional and play charades over video call (use chat functions to send the words to each other) or Pictionary or hangman using the whiteboard function that various video calling apps have.
- Plan a quiz with your friends- you can get ideas for quiz rounds and questions online, or make them personal to your friendship group!
- Set each other challenges to do at home- they can be as silly or as serious as you like. Want to know who in your friendship group can do the most press-ups in a row, or do the most steps on their stairs in an hour? Or perhaps the challenge is to find the tin in the cupboard with the oldest use-by date? Or have a cake decorating competition, or a still life around the home photo competition?



3. Workout together

- Lots of yoga classes are moving online, and lots are free! Have a look at the 'I'm stuck at home but still want to have fun' Facebook group (link at the beginning of this section) for almost daily free yoga options. You could also try: https://www.soulmovement.org.uk/classes_1
Even though you don't talk that much during yoga, being in a space and being accountable and seeing other people doing the same things as you at the same time is important for connectedness- and some stick around to chat at the end too!

- Equally, there are excellent online workout options. Have a look at <https://www.facebook.com/pg/projectawesomelondon/events/> for some brilliant workouts with a positive ethos and a great community (and coffee/chats after!), and also see the 'I'm stuck at home but still want to have fun' page for daily HIIT classes.
- If you normally run or walk as part of a group, and talking helps regulate your pace, organize to do your daily hour walk or run at the same time as someone else, and chat over the phone while you're at it!

4. Attend events and meet new people

- There are lots of free open 'webinars' and talks going on at the moment, where you call in and ask questions. Social media is a great way of finding these- join groups related to your interests and you'll see links to them.
- There are also free interactive mindfulness classes, such as these weekly classes by the Oxford Mindfulness Centre <https://oxfordmindfulness.org/online-sessions-podcasts/>. You can also attend short daily meditations for free at <https://www.innerspace.org.uk/webinar/>, as well as there being daily meditations on the 'I'm stuck at home but still want to have fun' Facebook page.
- Additionally there are wellbeing classes such as these by Stress Control <https://stresscontrol.org/>, and the open workshops run by BeMoreYou <https://www.facebook.com/BeMoreYouCommunity/>
- You could also attend the daily coffee morning, and one-track dance parties, or less regular bake-offs, camp-outs (at home), reflective spaces, talks, quizzes, and mindful movement spaces and so on organized by SayYesMore, in The YesTribe: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/theyestribe/>

