



CONNECT WITH EASE

Employee Assistance Service for Education

Monthly Article

Leveraging Our Support Systems In Times Of Social Distancing



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This month we are focusing on our **social systems of support**. As we move into our 4th month since the onset of the pandemic and implementation of social distancing practices, it is important to address the impact of these changes in our lives. Firstly, let's take a minute to reflect. Reflect on all the major changes and transitions in your life over the last few months. Take a pause here....

Some people have fared better than others during this period of social distancing. Social distancing can be difficult, especially for people separated from loved ones or whose normal relaxation and coping mechanisms have been disrupted. It can be tough to manage the isolation, no matter how necessary we know it is. The adjustment to these changes are varied based on a person's personal situation. Further, stricter orders of prolonged quarantine and social isolation, coupled with personal or family illness, financial issues, grief and loss, with the reduced access to our social support systems have the ability to exacerbate and overwhelm the coping capacity of an individual. Some have adjusted extremely well, while others have struggled and continue to struggle...

We know that having access to our support systems and social interactions have an effect on whether we experience positive or negative emotions. The need for human connection is very real. Studies show there is no replacement for this. Interacting with others doesn't seem to help much when you can't actually see or hear the people you are communicating with.

We should refocus on "physical distancing" and not "social distancing". I urge you to work in time for positive social interaction in your life while physical distancing. Be intentional, deliberate, and present as you connect with others. **We can be mentally and physically healthy and socially connected while physical distancing!** If you are currently thriving, think about how you can be a support for others that may be struggling. If you are experiencing negative mental effects from social distancing, remember that you are not alone. Don't be afraid to reach out for help!

LEVERAGING OUR SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN TIMES OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

BY: EASE STAFF

In the midst of the pandemic, we may find ourselves isolated as we practice social distancing and follow safety measures. We are asked to stay six feet apart from one another, avoid social gatherings and to stay home for the safety of ourselves and others. These practices are complete opposite to what most people are used to. People are social creatures by nature and thrive on social connections and interaction with others. However, during these times it may be difficult to cultivate social connections with our family, friends and loved ones. As we continue to practice social distancing, this lack of in-person contact can cause us to experience feelings of stress, isolation and loneliness.

Research has found that people who lack social connections face risks to their health and those who are socially isolated feel less happy and die younger than their more social counterparts.

Therefore, it is important to stay socially connected and avoid social isolation for the sake of our mental wellbeing. Even though we're being asked to keep a physical distance from one another, it doesn't mean that we should stop being social and lose contact with those we care for. Although our social interactions look different for us now, because we're used to face-to-face interactions. Finding ways to remain connected to each other is more important now than ever as we cultivate our support systems to help us cope with the realities of today. Research suggests that reaching out to others yields a positive effect as our interactions with others make us feel better, happier and more connected.



STAYING CONNECTED WHILE PRACTICING SOCIAL/PHYSICAL DISTANCING

There are many ways to stay connected while practicing physical distancing. Get creative!

THE VALUE OF OUR FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Although we are practicing physical distancing, this does not mean social alienation. As we face hard times, there are still many ways that you can stay connected and be prosocial during the pandemic.

Some habits that you can practice during these times include:

- **Gratitude**
 - You may have someone in your life who has done something meaningful for you. Now is the perfect time to express what it meant to you by writing them a letter, sending them an email, text or better yet a phone call.
- **Sharing Kind Thoughts**
 - Whenever you have a kind thought about someone, share it with that person. Share memories and kind thoughts via phone calls or video conversations!

Here are some ways to connect with others:

- Plan virtual coffee breaks together as you take a break from work-related tasks.
- Plan a movie night via Zoom, Google Hangout, Skype or Netflix Parties.
- Plan virtual check ins with those you care for.
- Connect on a deeper level and try having dinner via video with your favorite people!
- Plan a virtual dance party and groove to your favorite music, or take a virtual dance class with a group!
- Plan a virtual game night.
- If you've been on social media a lot, you may be feeling overwhelmed. Reach out with others to debrief over the phone or video conference in "real-time" conversations.
- Most important, focus on how to connect with others and "be present" during your interactions.

Research suggests that there's more potential for emotional connection in spoken conversation than text. When possible, try to make "live" connections with family, friends, and colleagues at least 2-3 times per day to preserve your relationships and mental well-being.

<https://news.uchicago.edu/story/how-connect-others-age-social-distancing>



TALK TO US
EASE has counselors if you want to talk.
(800) 882 1341