

Governmental and health entities are encouraging the public to self-isolate and social distance as we attempt to curb the impact of COVID-19 and its immediate threat to our communities. Mental health factors, such as loneliness and depression, can become issues as we limit the social interaction that most of us have become accustomed to on a daily basis. During these uncertain times, coping with the stress of losing jobs, deteriorating health, and the possibility of losing loved ones may lead to a sense of hopelessness.

Louise Hawkley, PhD, a senior research scientist with the research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, cited research that even perceived social isolation can be linked with adverse health conditions such as depression, poor sleep quality, and accelerated cognitive decline. The issues only become more substantial when the isolation is no longer just perceived, but immediate and ongoing.

There is also a prevailing concern that extended isolation may heighten risk for the population that have underlying mental health issues. Newcastle University epidemiologist Nicole Valtorta, PhD has said, "...loneliness has been found to raise levels of stress, impede sleep and, in turn, harm the body. Loneliness can also augment depression or anxiety." This isolation may lead those who are already suffering to experience deeper and more sustained problems.

Depression is one of the leading causes of suicide attempts across all ages. Mental or addictive disorders are associated with 90% of suicides. In 2018, the most recent figures available, over 48,000 Americans died to suicide. It is the second leading cause of death for the 12 – 18 (middle and high school aged), 18 – 24, and 25 – 35-year-old age groups. The number of suicide deaths for ages 10 – 14 have more than doubled within the last decade.

At this point in time, it is more difficult to consult a doctor, speak to a therapist, and rely on the social network that we have built for support. It is increasingly more imperative to use the resources that are in place to get in touch with the professionals that can help us overcome some of the issues that have arisen as we experience less social connectedness. Utilization of telehealth and telephonic communication with our health care professionals will be of the utmost importance in a time where isolation is being

recommended. Be sure to research what is available through your insurance or EAP providers.

If you or someone you love is struggling with depression or thinking about suicide, get help now. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), is a free resource that is available 24 hours a day for anyone who is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. The Crisis Text Line is a free 24/7 text line where trained crisis counselors support individuals in crisis. Text "Jason" to 741741 to

speaking with a compassionate, trained Crisis Counselor. Confidential support 24/7, for free.

The Jason Foundation is another resource available. The Jason Foundation is dedicated to the awareness and prevention of youth suicide through educational programs that equip youth, parents, educators, and the community with the tools and resources to identify and assist at-risk youth. Many times, a young person will exhibit clear warning signs prior to an attempt. By knowing the warning signs, and knowing how to help, you could save a life. Visit The Jason Foundation's website to learn more about youth suicide, the warning signs, and how you can help make a difference. The Jason Foundation has never charged a school, community, or individual for the use of their programs or resources. www.jasonfoundation.com

Depression can be exhibited in many ways and we should be cognizant of those exhibiting several signs for an extended period. Some of the warning signs associated with depression include the following:

- Sudden, abrupt changes in personality
- Expressions of hopelessness and despair
- Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Increased irritability and aggressiveness
- Withdrawal from family, friends and relationships