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The Relationship Between Loneliness, Isolation, and Social Distancing

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Objectives

1. Define the constructs of loneliness, isolation, and social distancing, their intra-relatedness, and the mechanisms by which they lead to poor physical and mental health.
2. Review how the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased attention on social isolation and loneliness affecting individuals of all ages.
3. Review intervention strategies to help combat loneliness and social isolation.

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Loneliness, Isolation, and Social Distancing

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Definitions

- **Loneliness**: distressing emotional response to perceived lack of quantity and/or quality of relationships

- **Isolation**: separation from or in the absence of others

- **Social distancing**: maintaining physical distance between self and others as a measure to prevent spread of disease or infection

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Physical & Psychological Effects from Loneliness and Social Isolation

- Less resilient to stress
- Weakens immune functioning
- Cognitive decline
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Decreases the likelihood that one will perform healthy behaviors such as exercising

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COVID-19: Social Isolation and Loneliness

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased attention on social isolation and loneliness affecting individuals of all ages.
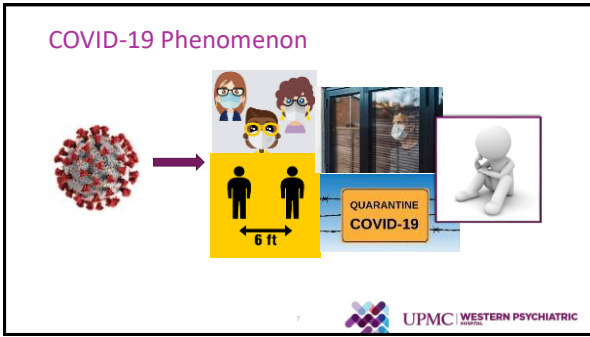
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COVID-19 Phenomenon

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Populations at risk

Older adults (especially >80 years-old)

Adolescents / young adults

Low income

Unemployed

LGBTQ
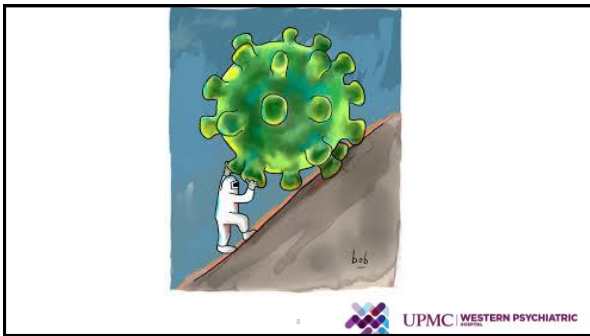
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Intervention and Coping Strategies

Ways to address and prevent isolation and loneliness

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Where do we start?

- Loneliness (subjective) and isolation (objective) are distinct constructs and therefore, must be addressed separately
- Targeting one doesn't necessarily influence the other
- Increasing social interactions, time spent with others, etc may not lead to feeling less lonely…
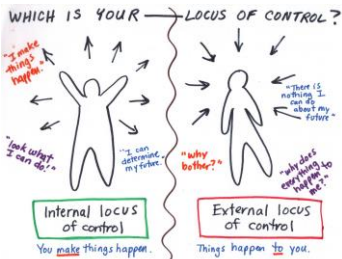- Need to address post-COVID era as well

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Locus of Control

Source: https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/resilience-and-locus-time-pandemic

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Coping Tactics

Source: www.nami.org   13

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Physiological Distress

- Deep breathing: 3-4-5 or 4-5-6
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Vigorous movement or exercise
- Mindfulness

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Reframe / Reassess

- Find the positive
- Look for opportunities
- Feel gratitude

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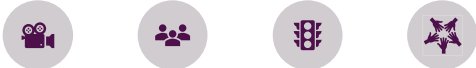
Social Connection

VIDEO CHATS   ONLINE COMMUNITIES   SAFELY DISTANCED/MASKED GET TOGETHERS   VOLUNTEER

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Apps

- Brain Manager
- Headspace
- Next Door
- Calm
- Facebook
- Meetup

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Other interventions and coping

- Self-care
- Routine
- Healthy diet
- Exercise
- Adequate sleep
- Social prescribing by healthcare providers
- Limit exposure to media/news
- Quality time with family/friends
- Spend time with pets

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Develop a plan & know your resources…

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Keeping each other safe and connected is everyone's responsibility

Physical distancing is not social isolation

Together we can beat COVID-19

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