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Quarantine: Coping with Feelings of Loneliness

-Personal Notation

Recently most of the individuals in my therapeutic practice have identified feelings of loneliness, resulting from being quarantined, especially with social distancing being enforced for over two months. In speaking to those individuals, one identified experiencing a decreased energy level, with a desire to sleep for extended periods of time. In addition a pervasive feeling of sadness was prevalent on a daily basis. Thus the purpose this article is to address those psychological symptoms and hopefully reduce those feelings.

EFFECTS OF THE QUARANTINE:

In one study, the effect of extreme confinement and isolation was conducted with individuals who lived in submarines, space stations or polar bunkers. The study examined three phenomenon's, with the first phenomenon being confusion and purchasing of multiple goods. The second phenomenon is the "honeymoon" with daily activities appearing new and novel. The "third-quarter phenomenon" which most may be experiencing is perceived, as a blur in time from one day to another. One's mood and morale are affected resulting in emotional outburst, aggressive behavior and conflictual interaction with others.

The current negative interaction due to the Coronavirus arises because of the uncertainty in the length of time of having to be quarantined. What initially began in March as a two-month period in the United States, increased in California to August (stage 4), with three additional months. This continued uncertainty in restricted social interaction has been said to continue into September or October, with the rationale of preventing a "second-wave of infections." No clear plan has been provided, other than a vaccine needs to be developed and COVID-19 ending. With the tenuousness in scheduling and guidelines and ending the quarantine, it exacerbates feelings of loneliness and compounds one's effect of boredom.

LONELINESS:

Interestingly several studies on the psychological effect on loneliness have been conducted by several researchers. One researcher, Julianne Holt-Lunstad from Brigham Young University, refers to loneliness as an adaptive response. An adaptive response, similar to assuaging our need in seeking out food when hungry or water when thirsty, but also seeking social connection with others when experiencing loneliness. A meta-study of 308,000 people (2015) on social

interaction, noted that individuals with a weaker social network were 50% likely to die over “a given period of time” (Miller, A. M. 1 May 2020)

In addition to seeking social connection is the need for daily “social rhythm reinforcers” of going to work, school and/or other social events. When we feel unproductive in completing routine-daily tasks, boredom insinuates into our lives. This boredom can result in heightened feelings of loneliness. Therefore the need to keep busy in creating and a regular routine can prevent feelings of loneliness resulting in boredom or vice versa.

-Biological Response of Inactivity

When one is bored, a lack of energy is experienced with a reduction of physical activity. In a study by the Journal of Applied Physiology, on the biological effect of inactivity, it results in the atrophy of the “heart and muscle mass.” This inactivity can also “affect various organs and systems, such as smooth muscles, skeletal muscle and central nervous system. On the opposite end of the spectrum, physical activities can increase one’s biological response of heighten hormonal levels of adrenaline, cortisol, cytokines, histamines, etc. These biological responses of increased hormonal levels are an attempt for the body to cope and thus gain some semblance of control from feelings of loneliness and boredom.

COPING SKILLS:

Figure: 1 – Daily Schedule (suggested itinerary)

9:00 a.m.	Exercise Plan [inclusive of <u>social partner(s)</u>]
9:30 a.m.	Breakfast (smaller snacks between meals)
10:00 a.m.	Personal self-care
10:30 p.m.	1-2 scheduled activit(ies) – reading, craft, etc.
1:00 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 p.m.	1-2 scheduled activit(ies) – reading, craft, etc.
6:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Communique [inclusive of <u>social partner(s)</u>]
8:30 p.m.	Exercise
9:00 p.m.	1-2 scheduled activit(ies) – reading, craft, etc.
12:00 a.m.	Bedtime

Coping with loneliness and boredom takes a conscientious effort in formulating a daily to weekly schedule (Flores, M.; see figure 1). The daily schedule should be noted, as a recommendation, with an individual revising it according to ones needs.

-Exercises

The daily schedule suggests engaging in an outdoor-exercise regime in the morning and evening. Outdoor activities in sunlight provide an increase in Vitamin D, which is an aid to ones immune functioning. In addition to exercising outdoor, an exercise regime of 75 minutes per week for increased aerobics to 150 minutes per week for low to moderate aerobics is suggested. Exercise that may include a daily regime of pushups, squats, lunges, etc. and/ or seeking an exercise program structured to one's bodily needs. Also beneficial in ones exercise regime would be to include a friend(s), preferably through social media, whereby one is able to engage in social interaction with others. In addition it provides an impetus in both the continuity and accountability as one engages in their exercise program. (Please consider consulting with a medical professional, when beginning an exercise regime.)

-Diet

Both exercise and nutrition are important components in helping boost ones immune system. One suggestion is adhering to a Mediterranean Diet, which is attributed to low rate of: obesity, heart disease and chronic disease. The diet consists of whole grains, good fats (fish), olive oil, nuts, vegetables, fruits and low consumption of other meats. (Please consult with a nutritionist or another medical professional, when beginning this or other diets.)

-Structured Activities

In addition to one's diet , a daily schedule including of structured activities is highlighted in a suggested list of Activities When Quarantined at Home. The activities provide a list of Personal, technological fun activities; Environmental, through household tasks; and Vocational, self-improvement activities. The suggestion in the Personal section provides a range of hobbies and websites of Etsy, Pinterest, Skillshare, etc,. Also working on a photo album, using websites such as Shutterfly, Storytree, etc., can be enjoyable. Also beginning an autobiography of one's life can provide a legacy for future generations.

-Self Care

The importance of self-care activities is imperative to one's mental health. Activities that include personal hygiene such as bathing, and make-up application on a daily basis can enhance a positive- self perception of oneself. One can vary daily activities, by taking a scenic drive,

walking and/or picnicking in different locales, riding ones bicycle, swimming if you have access to a pool, etc. But also allowing yourself some flexibility in the scheduling those activities, should be factored into the equation.

-Social Interaction

The activities previously suggested are solitary, but should also incorporate social interaction with others. A question one may ask is, “How can one engage in social interaction with others while quarantined?” This is a period that provides an opportunity to engage with others, whom one has previously not had time to contact. The contact can be through Facetime, virtual internet communique; phone calls, writing letters and/or making original cards to mail the “old-fashioned way.”

But the “old-fashioned communique” can be slow through postal mailing. Individuals may prefer a rapid response of telecommunicating through the internet. The later provides a rapid and readily accessible way to communicate with one’s social network, with an immediate response. Our daily schedule (figure 1) provides opportunities of social contact, as one engages in activities such as exercising, viewing television programs, etc. Through this type of social interaction, you can reduce feelings of loneliness, often times attributed to boredom. Thus the physical activity necessary to augment these feelings of loneliness and boredom is defined by the steps one takes. Rather than the quarantine defining an individual, being proactive in one’s daily activities can alter negative thoughts and feelings.

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