

How to Talk to Clients About Social Isolation During COVID-19

Talking with your clients about social isolation right now is important because social isolation can lead to intense feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and depression, which can make it challenging for clients to care for themselves on a day-to-day basis. The purpose is not to provide the services of a mental health specialist, but instead to help your client talk about their thoughts and feeling about social isolation, identify things they are doing or can do to feel more connected to others, and make sure they have support if they need it.

You can use the following steps and questions to have this conversation. Remember to **reflect** and **summarize** what the client has said. This will allow them to clarify any miscommunications, feel seen and heard, and better understand their own experiences.

Check in With Yourself

Before engaging with the client, check in with yourself. Ask yourself:

1. How am I feeling?
2. What am I telling myself about this? (Remember – you don't have to fix everything.)

Step 1: Introduce

Introduce the topic of social isolation.

- *“Covid has worsened social isolation for many people, and it can affect their ability to function.”*
- *“I am talking to all my clients about this – can I ask you a few questions?”*

Step 2: Explore

Ask the client about their thoughts and feelings.

- *“What’s social distancing been like for you?”*
- *“How has social distancing been affecting your ability to care for yourself?”*

Step 3: Discuss Strategies

Ask the client about ways they can address social isolation.

- *“What sort of things have you tried to make you feel less socially isolated?”*
- *“Would it be okay if I shared some things people have found helpful?”*

Step 4: Identify an Action Step

Identify one thing the client can do to help themselves.

- *“What are one or two options that sound good to you?”*
- *“When do you think you’ll try it?”*



Ideas for Reducing Social Isolation

Below are several tips for reducing social isolation. Remember as the facilitator to offer these tips as options, rather than things clients *should* try.

Connect with Other People

Help the client identify individuals in their life that they can seek support from.

- People the client has relied on in the past
- Possible new supports
- People the client can reach out to when anxious or stressed
- People the client can reach out to when NOT stressed

Identify Support Groups

Help the client to consider joining support groups that they could benefit from.

- Houses of worship and other faith-based organizations
- Virtual AA and NA meetings
- Online support groups for depression or anxiety

Support Others

Helping others when we are able to can feel good and help us feel connected with the people we engage with and the world.

- Be a listener for a friend
- Write a letter to a loved one
- Bring an infirm neighbor their mail and packages
- Make masks for the people in one's life
- Show support for frontline workers

Get Creative

There are a lot of creative things people can do to feel connected using both traditional methods (texting, phone, chat) and video platforms (Zoom, WhatsApp, etc.). Here are some ideas:

- HouseParty app to video chat and play games
- Virtual parties to watch TV or movies at the same time, texting or video chatting throughout
- Live group exercise classes, cooking classes, and other general interest groups
- Video games with a social element

