

WELLNESS GUIDE TO OVERCOMING ISOLATION DURING COVID-19

Being Connected, Staying Connected,
and Choosing Connection



★ SPECIAL PUBLICATION

Wellness Guide to Overcoming Isolation During COVID-19

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and Choosing Connection



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Note to the Special Publication

During the pandemic of COVID-19, people are struggling with isolation. Being alone and lonely is difficult enough, but stay-at-home orders and social distancing make it even more challenging to overcome such feelings and make connections.

To help address these challenges, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.'s (AHP) Human Potential Press, in collaboration with the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery, developed and is making available at no charge the *Wellness Guide to Overcoming Isolation During COVID-19: Being Connected, Staying Connected, and Choosing Connection*.

This new guide is designed to help you maintain emotional wellness and whole health. The practical information and exercises offer a pathway to making and building connections and help you overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness.

AHP's mission focuses on helping organizations and individuals reach their full potential. It is in the spirit of supporting full health and connection that we offer this new resource to you. We encourage you to use it, grow your connections, and share it with others.

Please let us know if you have questions, suggestions, or comments about using this guide.

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Introduction

We all experience periods of isolation and loneliness, and in these times, there are ways to reconnect with others and ourselves. There are many things we can do to take action on our own behalf and to create positive changes for ourselves.

This resource is designed for self-exploration about being connected, staying connected, getting reconnected, and choosing connection even during difficult times. You can use it on your own, with a friend, or with groups. There are six sections:

1. What Is Connection?
2. Enjoying Alone Time
3. Connection Tools
4. Daily Routine
5. Creating Structure
6. Qualities of Supporters

Individuals who are dedicated to personal wellness who have been providing and receiving peer support for over a decade developed this resource from discussions. It can provide encouragement and personal examples that can be shared with others to support us to get more ideas on being connected. You can print it and write notes in the space provided if that feels good, or you can write notes in a notebook, journal, or loose paper. Or, you can just enjoy reading it.

What Is Connection?

Connection is that link we have with the world outside ourselves. Connections can be made with people, places, and ideas. Connection can also be about the relationship we have with ourselves.



“When I am connected, it is about being and feeling present with myself, my environment, and the meaningful relationship I have with others in my life.”



“When I think about connection, I need to look at how I connect spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally to others and myself. I can have a lot of external support, but if I have not learned how to support my own internal world it can color the world black.”



“I think it is so important to acknowledge that there are many ways to become disconnected and we may not even see it happening. It can be because of events like illness, moving, job loss, death of a loved one, world events, etc. . . . Sometimes I go from alone time to being lonely. For me, the first step in moving on is figuring out how I got there in the first place.”



“For me, connection is about sharing. Sometimes it’s shared experiences like doing things together. I like having coffee with others, going for walks, reading the same books, watching the same TV shows, or loving cats. To me, sharing can sometimes feel risky and make my heart beat quickly. Overall, I know it is important to my physical and mental health.”



What does connection mean for me?

How Do We Take First Steps Toward Connection/Reconnection?

Making connections outside our home environment can also happen in safe, small increments. For example, take walks and say “hi” to people. Get lunch in a food court. Go to a library. Take classes, do volunteer work, or go to a place of worship. The initial steps will be different for everyone. Just take those first steps!

“There are many ways to get back on the path of reconnection. Some people can jump into the deep end and find a way to a large event. For me, it might need to be a smaller first step—a fragile link that I can strengthen with each success. I can start by simply being more engaged with everyday interactions. Instead of simply taking a purchase from a cashier, make eye contact, smile at them, and make a comment. It’s a small start, but I can get a smile back. Sometimes it is easier to get started to reconnect online. While there are plenty of support and connection groups, there are also group connections in the online world that might appeal to my creativity such as writer’s groups, cooking lessons, crafting groups. There are fun exercise classes online for those of us that might not be ready for a gym.”



What are my first steps?

Enjoying Alone Time

Feeling lonely and being alone are different. It can even be helpful to have a connection to our feelings of loneliness to process and move through those feelings. Being alone can be a way we connect with ourselves and process our feelings of loneliness.



“My time alone is precious to me. I must have some of it every day to get in touch with myself—who and what I want.”

Spending time alone can be an opportunity for discovery and healing.

“Being alone used to be something that I seemed to avoid at every cost and even was a very uncomfortable experience for me. I began to realize that I was avoiding a connection with myself and I needed to pay attention to that. I discovered poetry, art, listening to music, and journaling as things that supported me with the discomfort of being alone. Learning to enjoy being alone supported me to become more independent emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I didn’t feel as vulnerable to be hurt by others and had more to offer in my relationships due to a new found relationship with myself.”



“Sometimes I need to do the activities that connect me with my life before I can connect with people. I value connection with people in my life like my family but I also like to connect with my passions, such as reading, journaling, and dancing. I can do those things with others but sometimes I prefer to do them alone.”



“Spending time alone is something that feels very comfortable to me. I like reading, making arts and crafts, cooking, and watching TV. I find silence to be a beautiful thing in my life that provides a lot of clarity. I know that some others don’t feel the same way as I do, but it works for me.”

 **What supports me to enjoy time alone and feel safe alone?**



What does it mean to connect with myself?

Sometimes, due to external circumstances or internal reactions, we may experience disconnection with others, the environment, or even ourselves.

“Connecting with myself has really been an important development in my life. While dealing with degrading and derogatory voices for twenty years I really had to learn to detach and almost disassociate with myself to survive. But over the years I realized that the tool that helped me to survive wasn’t always going to be my best choice. Learning how to reconnect and disconnect at times from my shadow parts and difficult aspects of myself has really helped me grow and rally over a lot of the fears I have inside and find that I had more power than I thought.”



“To connect with myself I have to take time to fully know myself, at my core, without the hustle and bustle around me. It means taking the time to sit with myself in both comfort and discomfort until I can put everything aside and connect purely with my soul. Sometimes that means finding quiet space under a tree, feeling the cool summer breeze. Other times, that looks like spending time in the kitchen cooking my favorite dishes. I think how we get there looks different on different days, depending on where we’re at in the world, but connecting with myself always comes from passion and understanding.”



“Reconnection with myself is some of the hardest work I have learned. I had to rediscover the things in life that made me laugh, smile, and even feel again. I had to do things that supported me to feel at home again in my own body. Connection started on a very personal level and was vital to feeling capable of connecting the world around me again. In other words, I need to reconnect with my soul. I found this in nature, writing and reading poetry, meditating, art, and music.”

Connection Tools

We can discover and rediscover ways that support us to connect with our active wellness. Connection tools support our being connected, staying connected, and choosing connection. They are things that support our self-direction and being active in our own life. Our tools may be social, or they may be very individual things we can do alone.



“Taking a risk by joining an online group or reaching out through social media. I have to ask myself, ‘What is the recipe? The nutrients that nourish me mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?’ Increasing stretching and yoga supports me, but I also have to avoid things like watching too much news and limit my exposure to certain things.”



“I have tools for staying socially connected like texting my friends at the gym, online church services, spending time with my husband, planning a ‘dream’ vacation, and calling my sister. I also have connection tools for staying active in my life like dancing in my living room, writing a play, reading my magazines, and taking a virtual roller-coaster ride.”



“Some tools support me both externally and internally, for example joining a writer’s group, a book club, church, and praying with others as well as alone. These things can help me to feel connected and stay active independent of what is happening in my external world. Internally, developing a kinder voice in my head and creating a gratitude list are important.”



“My connection tools are walking in the park, by the ocean, and journaling.”



What are my connection tools?

Daily Routine

Planning for and starting each day with a vision and intention for being connected is important. Each day we can ask ourselves, ‘what does connection look and feel like for me today?’ or ‘What do I need to do so I feel ready and strong enough to reach out?’



Sometimes events beyond our control can change how we stay connected, and sometimes how we feel may change the way we want to experience connection. Think about creating a list so that regardless of what’s happening or how we feel on any given day, we can remain active and connected.

“Daily routines are important. There are days when I have to motivate myself to do my daily routine. I use the ‘act as if’ scenario. I act as if I am going to be driving into work, therefore, I get up at the regular time, have my coffee, shower, close my bedroom door, and then go to my workspace. There has to be adjustments to my daily routine. Part of my new daily routine is setting timers so that I know when it’s break time, when it’s lunch time, when I need to stop working and check in on where the kids are at with school work.”



“Starting each day by taking the time to connect with myself is important. I ask myself, ‘What do I need/want today?’ Then I create a vision and intention for that day and how I want to be connected. For example, I am getting outside, moving around, cleaning one drawer, cupboard, surface in my house; I am talking with people, making arrangements to meet friends for coffee, spending time on one creative project, being in nature alone or with a companion. Many of us realize that as we are finding balance in our life we need time to support both our internal and external connectedness.”



“On a good day, connection for me is balanced between personal time to explore my passions, time with my husband, time for faith, time dedicated to work as a team, and opportunity to move my body. Some of my daily ‘to dos’ are: coffee just the way I like it, daily devotional, hugging my husband, connecting with at least two people—email, phone, or text—check my work calendar, and getting some fun exercise.”



“External environment or circumstances may influence how I am able to stay connected. Embracing my daily routine gives me the internal structure to be well to reach out externally to create connections and structure to support my holistic wellness. I can create a list that supports me on any given day: Have a shower and brush my teeth, do morning pages, look at the ocean, make my bed, read a book, and have a bath with candles.”



How can having a daily routine support my connection journey?



What is my daily routine?

Creating Structure



Creating structure is something we can do for ourselves. A daily routine is an example of one structure we create, and we can benefit from creating more self-directed structures in our life.

Sometimes welcome and unwelcome changes to our structures can cause us to connect or disconnect in ways that create feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, we can design a structure for ourselves by choosing supports and activities that give us a sense of welcome change, healthy boundaries, empowerment, and self-direction.

“I’m going back to how the structure in my life changes and what adjustments I can make or might try that work well for me. How would I like to organize my day/week/weekend and activities? I have incorporated in my weekly routine calling a friend and streaming movies at the same time and remaining on the phone to have a conversation or make comments on what we’re watching. Today am I willing to take the risk that comes along with using social media to establish new relationships, and [can I] use technology to create new relationships that are based on mutuality and respect?”



“At the beginning of each week I will organize my work schedule to balance the time I am on the computer with other tasks I need/want to accomplish. Weekends are for family and faith. Each day I will plan a time to PAUSE from the calendar ‘to dos’ and exercise choosing one of my connection tools.”



“I like routines and feel my best when I stick to them. I get up at the same time each day, make coffee, take a walk, and then look at my schedule. But to make this work, I’ve needed to learn what time I need to get up to do those things, especially allowing enough time for a walk. I have to make sure I have what I need to make my morning coffee. When my routine is going well, I find that I am better able to make connections with loved ones.”



“Most of my life I had been taught what, when, and how to be and participate in life. Creating my own structures for what really supported me to connect with myself and others in the world was a discovery I had through a training I attended on the Wellness Recovery Action Plan by the Copeland Center. At that point I was empowered to define for myself what I wanted to look like and feel like when I was my most well self. That process gave me a new structure for seeing myself, creating new personal goals and action plans. I also validated how important journaling and writing poetry was as a structure for connecting with myself on deeper levels for my emotional healing and growth. Making commitments, dates, and plans with friends, family, and colleagues has been an important structure that I choose to stay connected and active.”



How do I want to create structure for myself?

Qualities of Supporters

Now is a great time to *choose* who we want to connect with. While we cannot control the people in our lives, we can choose relationships that support a sense of connection with ourselves and others. What are the qualities of supporters who create healthy connections for us? We can begin to intentionally build more and more supportive connections in our life by defining what we like in those who we have had connections with in our lives.



“I have discovered that people who are authentic about who they are, not quick to judge others, like to discuss ideas but not other people, and are good listeners make me feel a connection with them and myself.”



“I think diversity is something I had to work at to see its real potential. Commonalities are a great starting point but looking for them was a barrier to potential unseen horizons. It is amazing to me the unlimited potential to connect once I am open for it and work through preconceived notions I may have.”



“Not every connection leads to a best friend or soul mate. Maybe the first connection is with the local barista or a friendly neighbor.”



“Attributes of supporters for me are: quality time where both people have a chance to share; trustworthy and consistent; finds value in me, the person; shares interest; walks with me and does with me; curious enough to lean forward to listen and learn; and we share values and we try to live our values.”

 **What qualities do I want in my supporters?**

Connection Goes Two Ways

One way we can build on the support we receive from others is to be a support to them. Asking our supporters about ways we can support connection and wellness in the relationship is the first step.

“When I realized that my best and most reliable supporters were people that I support as well, I was able to apply that thought to every part of my life. Today I achieve so much more with more supporters than I could ever have imagined. I want my supporters to be people who believe in my capability and so I believe in their abilities. I don’t assume anymore that to support people is to assume they need me to do things for them they didn’t even ask me for. I believe in them to let me know what I can do to give support. Active listening means paying close attention to what is important to people I care about and seeing their strengths.”



“I often think of mutuality in support. The deepest practice I know I must do in order to keep out nasty traps of the intellect is gratitude. My mind wants to look for reciprocal, and humanity is just too complex for that to be a relationship equation. There are often energies and things below the surface that I am not even aware of in my relationships, and if I can break free from the role playing of help or helper I won’t short change my expectations for people or myself.”



“Ways I support my supporters is to slow down enough to be curious and listen without thinking forwardly to the next things to do; recognize my own boundaries and make them known, and be interested in learning the boundaries of others; invite supporters to do things on my connection tools list and be willing to try new things that others want to do; create little surprises for loved ones; and check in on loved ones that cannot get out often and offer to pick up items at the store for them.”



How can I support my supporters?

“When I have found myself feeling very lonely and isolated, it seemed insurmountable to reconnect at that time. My self-esteem was very low. However, I can break it down by remembering my strengths, hopes, and dreams; creating a vision for wellness and what type of connections I wanted in my life. I was able to develop routines and methods to make those connections happen.”

Making connections with ourselves and others is a priority, and it’s important to our whole health. We were made to connect with the world around us and the people in it. It’s how we survive and thrive. We just need to take the first step.

Resources

WRAP® (Wellness Recovery Action Plan®) is a self-designed prevention and wellness process that anyone can use to get well, stay well, and make their life the way they want it to be through a series of tools and action plans. It's used extensively by people in all kinds of circumstances and by health care and mental health systems all over the world to address all kinds of physical, mental health, and life issues.

Wellness Recovery Action Plan, *The Loneliness Workbook*, *The Worry Control Workbook*, and all WRAP products are available at WRAPandRecoveryBooks.com. For questions, please email books@WRAPandRecoveryBooks.com.

For opportunities to learn more about and develop plans for your wellness, visit the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery at www.copelandcenter.com. There are many online and in-person trainings, workshops, and certification courses based on wellness and peer support.

About the Publisher

For more than 30 years, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc., (AHP) has influenced change in health and business systems to support vulnerable populations—from creating policy all the way to ground-level, hands-on work. Our mission is to improve health and human services systems of care and business operations to help organizations and individuals reach their full potential. Our team of experts, including those with lived experience who identify as individuals in recovery, provide training and technical assistance, research and evaluation, and consulting services in areas like behavioral health, team supports, housing and homelessness, criminal justice, public health, and population health, among others.

AHP acquired WRAP and Recovery Books in 2016, including more than 30 books, manuals, curricula, and multimedia products. Human Potential Press, a division of AHP, publishes all WRAP books and materials. Mary Ellen Copeland, Ph.D., remains a senior advisor to AHP, as do many members of the WRAP community, including individual WRAP users, WRAP Facilitators, and WRAP Advanced Level Facilitators. To learn more about AHP, our work, and our team, visit www.ahpnet.com.



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