



Communication and Social Distance

During this time of social distancing, strong communication skills are more important than ever. Communicating primarily by phone or written word eliminates many of the non-verbal cues most people use to indicate what they are thinking or feeling, and could result in misunderstandings or conflict.

If you're struggling to communicate effectively while working apart from your colleagues, try these tips:

- ▶ **Learn technology.** The Internet makes it easier for people to work from home or at a distance, but it may require some basic technological skills. If possible, take the time to test video conferencing software before you try to use it in a professional setting. Instead of getting frustrated, have fun with miscues. Technology offers options for connecting with friends and family too. Find an app that works for everyone and set up a virtual family dinner.

- ▶ **Listen.** When you're speaking with someone on the phone or on video chat, stay off your computer or other devices unless using them is necessary to the conversation. Focus your attention on the other person, just as you would if you were in the same room with them.
- ▶ **Ditch preconceptions.** Don't assume that you know what someone else is thinking. Instead, use open-ended questions, such as, "Can you describe what your ideal outcome would be?" This will encourage the person to articulate their thoughts and feelings in more detail. Use clear, specific language to describe your own ideas and point of view.

- ▶ **Be kind.** Many people are feeling stressed or uncertain right now. Take the time to ask how colleagues are coping and provide support. Be patient with extra challenges related to working from a distance.

Improving communication skills will have a lasting impact, and could strengthen not just work relationships, but personal ones as well. For 24/7/365 assistance with communicating more effectively, contact LifeMatters.



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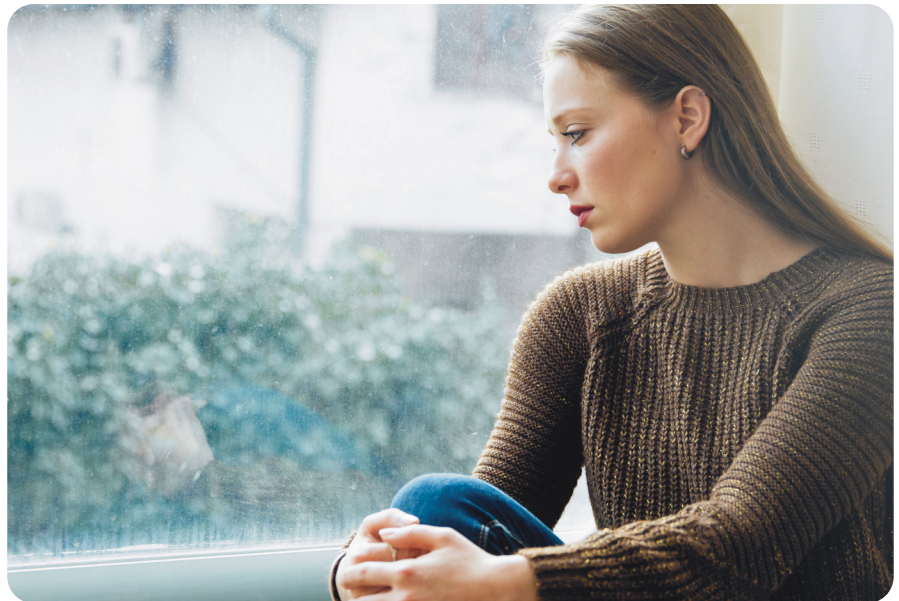
Coping with Social Isolation

Feeling claustrophobic? Being quarantined, social distancing, and sheltering in place feel like a loss of control. This is a stressful situation, and may decrease wellbeing, tax relationships, and test personal resilience.

Common reactions to social isolation include restlessness or outright agitation, disturbed sleep, anxiety, anger, boredom, irritability, loneliness, and cabin fever.

So how do you cope? First, remember we're all in this together. Next, embrace strategies proven to support coping in the face of imposed separation from others. Here are a few to try:

- ▶ **Create a routine.** Having a regular schedule of activities creates structure and purpose. Studies show that predictable routines lower anxiety.
- ▶ **Tackle projects.** Use this hiatus to catch up on projects that have been backburned. Doing something productive increases our feelings of personal power, restoring a sense of control during a time of uncertainty.



- ▶ **Play games.** Video and board games help pass the time. Using both types offers variety, which helps keep the mind engaged and interested. Gaming with others, whether in person or online, reduces feelings of isolation.
 - ▶ **Go outside.** As little as ten minutes outside increases the amount of serotonin and dopamine (both “feel good” chemicals) in the brain. Being in nature often decreases the sense that the walls are “closing in.”
 - ▶ **Exercise.** Even short bursts of exercise positively impacts mood. If you can't go for a walk, try stretching, climbing stairs, doing push-ups, or finding an online exercise routine.
- ▶ **Learn.** If you've always wanted to learn a new language, take an online course, or focus on a creative project, now is the time. Learning and creative activities force us to engage with the present moment, rather than worrying about what might happen next.
 - ▶ **Connect.** A Harris poll found an estimated 70% of people reported feeling lonely on a frequent basis. Social isolation exacerbates this issue, particularly for the elderly. Ramp up your interactions with others, whether by phone, digitally, or via snail mail. Now more than ever, we need each other.

Whether you want to brainstorm more ideas for increasing your sense of control or just need to talk with someone for a while, LifeMatters can help. Call 24/7/365.

Dollars & Sense: Analyzing Spending

While setting a budget is an important part of cutting expenses, it's just the first step. Analyzing your spending will help you look beyond where the money is going and help you determine whether you're putting it in the right place.

Analyzing spending is important because it catches the little expenses and impulse purchases that aren't factored into your budget. Over time, these "extras" can add up to big money and make it harder to budget for big ticket items or save for the future.

If it's time to analyze your spending, these tips may help:

- ▶ **Keep track of everything you spend.** Include service fees and purchases made from your discretionary spending fund. Add these up at the end of each week, and do a full month's overview as well.
- ▶ **Find an app.** If you don't want to go the pen and paper route, there are plenty of apps available to help you review your spending

or alert you when you're over budget. Some will even cancel subscriptions you may have forgotten about. Make sure the app you choose is highly rated and has a clear statement of privacy and security.

- ▶ **Download your annual spending report.** This report is often available annually, for both debit and credit cards, through your financial institution. Typically, your spending will be broken down by categories, such as gas, groceries, or entertainment.



- ▶ **Comparison shop.** Compare providers of monthly services, such as cable or cellular service. If only one service provider is available in your area, perform an analysis of the available plans to see if you could find a more cost-effective option.
- ▶ **Look for discretionary spending cuts.** This period of social distancing and isolation may be helpful in determining what discretionary spending you could live without. Add up the amount of money you would have spent on coffee, eating out, and entertainment outside your home during a typical week. Consider making changes to your daily activities that would allow you to put this money toward paying off debt, saving for the future, or making a major purchase.

The LifeMatters Financial Service is available to help you adjust your spending, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and after it ends. LifeMatters can help you cope with the stress of financial worries as well. Call 24/7/365.

Retirement Fund Worries

Retirement funds have taken a beating in the last few months. Financial markets have been turbulent, and uncertainty about the impact COVID-19 may have on businesses and individual finances has made it more volatile.

While it may be scary to check your balances and see just how much ground you've lost, it's important to stay calm. Pulling your money out of your retirement fund when it's low will make it much more difficult for you to recover what you've lost, and could lead to tax penalties. If you're not sure what to do next, try these tips:

- ▶ **Know where you stand.** Some people advise not looking at your retirement fund balance during a market downturn. While checking too often may be upsetting, it's a good idea to review your balance at least once a month or prior to



speaking with a financial adviser. Understanding where you are will help you make better choices when resetting your short, medium, and long-term retirement goals.

- ▶ **Seek professional advice.** It's a good idea to talk to a financial adviser about your options. The adviser will evaluate your portfolio based on your age, income status, and risk tolerance and help you determine if your money should be invested differently.
- ▶ **Keep saving.** While it may be tempting to dial back how much you are putting into your retirement fund, it may result in a higher tax bill at the end of the year. Your best bet is to keep

putting the same percentage of your income into your retirement. If you're concerned that you may be in too many higher risk investment vehicles, consult with a financial adviser.

- ▶ **Pay off debt.** During times of financial uncertainty, the first priority after paying basic monthly bills is getting rid of debt. Look for ways to cut back on expenses and devote that extra money to debt repayment. After the debt is gone, put extra cash toward savings or increase your retirement contributions.
- ▶ **Get started.** If you don't have a retirement fund, now is as good a time as any to start. Take full advantage of any match your employer may offer.
- ▶ **Re-evaluate.** If you are close to retirement, a financial adviser can help you take a clear look at your options. Don't assume that you'll have to delay your retirement.

The LifeMatters Financial Consultation Service is available to discuss retirement or any other financial concern. Call anytime.

Source: Balance

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