

# Coping with lockdown loneliness during the holidays

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(HealthDay)—Pandemic lockdowns will increase Americans' risk of

loneliness and depression this holiday season, an expert warns.

"People are grieving for similar reasons: loss of family members, jobs, relationships, friendships and physical touch. Everyone is suffering," said Dr. Asim Shah. He's professor and executive vice chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"Holiday blues will affect a lot of people this year, including those who haven't suffered from it before," he added.

Shah offered some tips to reduce and cope with holiday loneliness.

Instead of using the phrase "[social distancing](#)"—which can make some people feel more depressed—use the phrase "physical distancing," he suggested.

Create new holiday traditions by socializing outdoors with a small group of loved ones. Just be sure to follow guidelines and keep your distance, Shah said. And use social and digital media to stay in touch with family and friends.

Having a positive circle of loved ones to reach out to also helps defeat loneliness, Shah said. That circle should include people other than those who live with you.

"That [safe environment](#) will be your crutch and your help, and you will be their help," Shah said. "Everyone needs socialization."

Be aware of signs of holiday depression: feeling withdrawn or disconnected, not enjoying things you used to enjoy, lack of motivation, sleep problems, poor appetite, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, irritability, or fatigue.

If isolation or loneliness leads to depression, seek help immediately, Shah advised. Connect with professionals via telehealth and join self-help groups—many of these also meet virtually.

If you think a loved one has [holiday](#) depression, help them find professional help.

"Don't be judgmental. Give your loved ones options and be supportive. Be a good listener and guide them through this time," Shah said.

Many Americans are also experiencing survivor's guilt after losing loved ones to COVID-19. To cope with that this [holiday season](#), Shah offered this formula:

- **Mindfulness:** Focus on breathing techniques and meditation.
- **Self-care:** Read, listen to music, exercise.
- **Helping out:** Be optimistic and help others by volunteering; lend a hand to elderly neighbors; offer financial help if possible; donate blood; and educate people on how to wear a mask.

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