

CFWC Health and Wellness Chairman

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COVID-19 and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

So much about COVID-19 has been learned, but there is still so much more. We have learned what the symptoms are and what will diminish our chances of getting the virus (mask, 6 feet social distancing, and hand washing and sanitizing). We are now starting to learn, after five months, some of the side effects of not only having survived hospitalization (trauma from entering without family, ICU, and intubation), having been quarantined for a positive COVID test (trauma as a threat to life and physical integrity), and fear of getting the virus. All can lead to isolation. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reports that 87% of recovered patients have at least one lingering symptom. Per the Mayo Clinic, 8% of US adults (mostly women) have been affected with PTSD.

Besides the ongoing physical issues that the virus may have caused, mental issues are starting to appear similar to PTSD due to social isolation. Social connections are one of the leading predictors of successful aging. We are social animals so social isolation can cause depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and fear especially if a family member or good friend has died from the virus.

So, what can be done? Create a support system, stay connected, and listen to the person exhibiting symptoms. Since we are right now in a place where we can't physically reach people, we will need to make contact in other ways.

Set up a telephone tree for your membership. All members can be contacted to see how they are doing (listen), and what they need (grocery shopping, doctor's visits, etc.). See if they have family that checks in with them and get a phone number. Find out if they have other media tools available to them, (iPhones, Kindle, Computers, iPads, Facebook, etc.) so you will know if they have ways to connect. Make a plan for them to give them something to look forward to. Depending on what equipment they have, you can help them set up apps, give them web addresses for videos, concerts, webinars' etc. Set up a Zoom app so they can follow meetings. Also, let them know when you will be contacting them again.

Do they like to read or do puzzles? Do members in the club have books and puzzles that they could give them? Is there a club activity they can help with it if it is brought to their home? The purpose of all this is to keep them busy.

Write letters/cards to support groups such as Support Our Troops (<https://supportourtroops.org/cards-letters>), Girls Love Mail (<https://www.girlslovemail.com>), etc..

If they are in a senior residence, most of above would apply. Check with the Director to see if they are kept busy. Do they play hallway/doorway bingo or other games? Does the member participate in activities as much as they are able? Are they able to have visitors (have they set up a small area where they can talk through plexiglass)? What is the policy to see family/friends – Facetime, Zoom, etc.? Does the facility have a tech person that can teach them how to use the media equipment?

If after all this, if the person still shows no interest and conversations are getting darker, ask them if they would like to talk to a professional. The number for the National Alliance on Mental Health is 800-950-6264.

We're all lonely from time to time, but the problems come when someone is chronically lonely, day in and day out.

Remembering back to the 80s and a Rick Springfield song our daughters played over and over called The Human Touch, the last line is, "We all need the human touch, and I need it too!"