

## Overcoming Isolation During the Holiday Season

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season looks a lot different this year. COVID-19 has forced us to find new ways to connect, and according to mental health experts, it could take a toll on our mental health.

In fact, a recent [Gallup poll](#) found Americans' mental health is the worst it's been at any point in the last two decades.

Linda Craft is an OSF HealthCare behavioral therapist. She says making extra effort to stay connected is more important than ever this year.

"I think it going to present more challenges than normal. I don't think it needs to though. I believe that isolation is important right now to keep ourselves safe, but we don't have to totally isolate. I think there are many, many ways we can isolate safely," urged Craft.

One of those ways is to embrace technology, even when it may not be your area of expertise.

For those who need a little help, Craft suggests reaching out to tech-savvy friends and relatives to walk you through social platforms and connection options.

"Don't be afraid of technology. Many people have gotten very savvy with using their phone, using a computer. But if you're not one of those people, be one of those people," Craft says. "We live in a world now where technology can keep us connected to others. Learn how to FaceTime. Learn how to make videos on your phone so that you can send them to your friends and family and keep connected. That's a gift that we've been given to get through this time that we're in."

Isolation can also create opportunities. Craft recommends using time spent at home to get creative, and suggests making homemade gifts for loved ones or taking extra time to decorate your house for the season. Finding joy in activities can help us feel less lonely.

"There are many things to do while we are isolated that don't make us feel as isolated and can keep us in the holiday spirit," said Craft.

"It's really important to remember that the holidays are a joyful time. We might have to change the messages in our head that say, 'oh – this is going to be horrible.' Find joy, because that's what the holiday season represents."

However, sometimes even the brightest lights, the prettiest tree and calls with family and friends don't take away deeply rooted feelings of depression and anxiety.

Craft encourages people noticing changes in their behavior to contact their primary care physician, and that reaching out for help is never the wrong path.

"It's a sign of strength to reach out for help, and to say that this is a stumbling block that I've run across and I just need that little extra push to get through it. So don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to say, 'Okay. Just for this time, let me go seek some professional help,'" urged Craft.

And she says to remember that while this holiday season is unlike anything we have ever experienced, the changes won't last forever. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and better days to come.

"Be okay with that things are going to be different, but know there is a period at the end of that sentence. It's going to be different for this year, period. Next year we have great hopes that it will be better. It will be more tolerable. It will be more joyful. This isn't going to be the way that it's always going to be," Craft says.

If you or a loved one is struggling with stress, anxiety or depression during the holiday season and it is not an emergency, you can reach out to an OSF Behavioral Health navigator by calling (309) 308-8150. They can direct you to the right resource for what you're experiencing. [OSF SilverCloud](#) is a no-cost online resource available 24/7.