

Ask Your Therapist

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Social Isolation

As the summer heats up and the humidity has arrived, I notice how much stress the average person seems to be in these days. And I notice that in the attempt to save money many folks are staying close to home “We’re taking a staycation!” and not relaxing at all! They seem to be “turtling” inside their homes, worried about money, jobs, the future, etc.

It is another one of the dysfunctional signs of the times that we can live in close proximity to other humans and not know their names, which house or apartment they live in or something about their lives. (The only clear exception is the people who know the names of everyone’s dogs but are very unclear about who the humans are who are attached to the dogs.)

What was once a ritual of courtesy (and safety) for the established members of a neighborhood to welcome the newest people into the neighborhood as a way of helping them get oriented (and check them out), has now gone the way of the typewriter. Isolated and lonely people are now making contact through online social communities with mixed results. People can experience a kind of instant gratification with strangers who may or may not be who they say they are and imbibe in a kind of false intimacy that reminds me of artificial sweeteners: very sweet to the taste buds but no real nutritional value. Or others have found a whole new brave world of connections, reunions and satisfying venues of new contexts for new or known friends. It’s the wild west out there in cyberspace.

What is the cure for social isolation? There are many paths, depending on your nature. You can invite people into your home and life and tell them who you really are and what you want to give and receive. Or you can venture out into the world and meet people such as your neighbors, people at work and people who frequent the place you also go to. You can volunteer to help someone running for office, go to the local town events, tutor kids after school, help the local animal shelter with their fund raising events, help fix up the local playground or shelve books at the library. The point is to get out of your small world and into situations where you can interact with others in a meaningful way.

To paraphrase a popular bumper sticker: Go ahead and dive into your life. This is not a dress rehearsal!

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.