

# How To Be Alone, But Not Lonely, Despite The Coronavirus

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Heard on [Morning Edition](#)

As a writer, Lily Burana already spends a lot of time working alone at home, about an hour outside New York City. And as an extrovert, Burana says she relies on her social network to balance out the lonely hours.

"It's really hard, because at the end of the day, I look forward to shutting my laptop and taking my daughter to a playground, or going shopping, or meeting a friend at a museum, or having a coffee," Burana said. "And all of those things have to be tabled for now, out of a sense of obligation to not turn myself into an accidental vector."

Social distancing is an [important way to slow down](#) the spread of the [new coronavirus](#). But for many Americans, like Burana, keeping distance from other people — especially during a time of stress and uncertainty — can feel isolating and lonely.

Burana said she's healthy as far as she knows, but she has been voluntarily cutting out almost all social activities to do her part to [slow the contagion](#). She's relying on social media more than usual to feel connected.

"It helps me maintain some kind of lifeline," she said. "I don't know how people in TB sanitariums did it, because you couldn't just hop on Twitter and complain about how alone you were then."

Loneliness isn't such a big concern for Kevin Barthauer, a chef from Noblesville, Ind., who lives with his wife and five boys. They homeschool, so the family is used to being at home together.

But social isolation is taking a toll as they skip events such as church services and extracurricular activities, Barthauer said.

"The 6-year-old and the 9-year-old have some sort of mutual destruction pact — they're gonna kill each other, I think," he joked.

So they're coping by organizing family game and movie nights at home.

"We watch episodes of *Star Trek* together," Barthauer said. "Luckily we do enjoy being a family together, so that's nice — but it can be challenging."

Emily Newell and her husband are adjusting to working from home in Portland, Maine. She's used to spending her days with students and colleagues at the University of Southern Maine, where she teaches sports management. But now, classes are [being moved online](#).

"It feels kind of isolating and a little bit scary," Newell said. "I don't think we were overly nervous about it initially, but as stuff is kind of starting to shut down ... it's kind of that weird realization of like, 'Oh crap, we might just be us and our cats in our apartment for awhile.'"

With her parents hundreds of miles away in Ohio, Newell says the prospect of not being able to travel to be with them feels isolating, too.

"I mean, my mom will probably be annoyed; I'll probably call my mom a lot," Newell said, laughing.

Newell said she's also coping by reading and staying in touch with her students online.

For Clint Schaff, working remotely isn't a new experience; he started that about a year ago after following his wife from Los Angeles to the Bay Area for work. He said it was difficult at first.

"But I guess my lesson ... over the last few months is that being socially distant doesn't mean being socially separated," Schaff said.

Schaff, who works on strategy and development for the *Los Angeles Times*, said he's learned to prioritize staying connected virtually. In recent days, he has been reaching out to friends who are new to working remotely because of the coronavirus, scheduling video chats and online meetings over morning coffee. "I think the more we can kind of bring what we love about offline gathering — and hopefully we'll get back to [that] fairly soon — if we can bring that online to some extent, that will help us during this hopefully short time," Schaff said.

Staying virtually connected is an important strategy for fighting social isolation, said Ashwin Vasan, president and CEO of [Fountain House](#), a New York City-based charity that works to reduce the effects of isolation on people with mental illness.

"Call that friend you haven't spoken to in years; call your mother, as they say," he advises.

Vasan suggests talking with loved ones about how the experience is feeling — and reframing the way we think about this period of isolation.

"By distancing yourself, you're contributing to a societal act — a collective action — that is not only protecting yourself, but protecting others," Vasan said. "And so if we can see some community in that, and see some connectedness in that, I hope that's a motivating and aspirational way of looking at something that is inherently difficult."

[https://www.npr.org/2020/03/17/816691923/how-to-be-alone-but-not-lonely-despite-the-coronavirus?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_term=nprnews](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/17/816691923/how-to-be-alone-but-not-lonely-despite-the-coronavirus?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_term=nprnews)

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