



THE **eBella** **eXtra**

ENGAGING IN ISSUES BETWEEN THE ISSUES

Staving Off Loneliness during COVID-19

Blue Zone's Power 9 principles offer guidance for staying connected during a crisis

by Deb Logan

Witnessing losses from COVID-19 and the guidelines imposed to keep us safe seem to create a desire to catch up with friends from an earlier lifetime or invest more time into those we've sometimes taken for granted.

As we do this, it is also vital to reach out to neighbors, friends, family and colleagues who might be especially vulnerable to the risks associated with loneliness during these isolating times.

If loneliness persists, it is dangerous to our health. Former Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy equated the risk of loneliness to smoking 12 cigarettes a day. A Brigham Young University study showed that people who identify as lonely or isolated are at a 26 to 32% higher risk of early death. And the threats of loneliness are further exacerbated when it coexists with anxiety.

An AARP Foundation study found more than a third of adults over age 45 are lonely. Enter COVID-19, and these numbers are certain to climb across all age groups.

Some of the tools Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida provides can help. The Power 9 well-being principles of Family First, Right Tribe, Belong and Purpose are particularly relevant to fending off loneliness.

Family First

Facetime or set up a Zoom meeting with family members across the world or even next door. If that's not your style, call more often. Seeing a loved one's face or hearing their voice can serve as a virtual hug during a time when so many are feeling especially unsettled.



Right Tribe

Ask friends, neighbors and colleagues to become part of your support system, or as it is called in Okinawa, Japan, one of the original Blue Zones, your moai. Create some regular times during the week to touch base and share how you are doing. Moais can take virtual walks, eat healthy meals, watch a TV series, participate in a book club and so much more — together.

The greatest well-being gift we can give ourselves is to give to someone else.

Belong

Many faith-based organizations are offering online services. Invite someone to listen in virtually and then connect via phone after the service to talk about the inspirational messages you received. Have a discussion with someone about what you are grateful for. Keep a gratitude journal and reflect on it when loneliness and anxious or depressing thoughts pervade.

Purpose

COVID-19 is definitely a triggering event, meaning it is one of those game-changing experiences that disrupts our daily focus and purpose. The usual things that give a person reason to wake up in the morning may not be as tangible right now, but there are ways to adapt to our current situation. If you normally volunteer at an organization, ask if you can help in a virtual way.

Consider making it your purpose to reach out to those who are particularly vulnerable right now. Does someone who is alone need someone to talk to, or could they use help with getting their groceries, medications or pet food in a safe manner? The greatest well-being gift we can give ourselves is to give to someone else.

To practice these and other Power 9 well-being principles, consider the following or go the Blue Zones Project Virtual Power 9, <http://bluezonesproject.hs-sites.com/southwestflorida/virtual-wellness-opportunities>.

Deb Logan is Blue Zones Project SWFL's executive director. She has more than 30 years of experience in health and wellness, and about as many years living in Naples.