

# Self Isolation – Tips to Help You Cope

By Christina Hodgkinson

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DISCLAIMER: I'm not a medical expert. This book is based on my lived experiences as a disabled person and my previous experiences of self isolation. This book is not a substitute for professional medical support, so if you feel unwell please seek medical advice.

## Preface

Hello,

If you're reading this there's a good chance that you are self isolating or about to. I'm currently voluntarily self isolating due to the coronavirus/ covid19, and I've self isolated twice before due to my disability/ health problems.

I sincerely wish the best for you and your loved ones during these unprecedented times.

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## Coronavirus/ covid19

We are currently in unprecedented times. It's a surreal and unsettling time. The global situation has been totally turned on its head. Things change not just day to day, but by hour by hour. Too many have already lost loved ones, too many are already seriously ill with the virus. There is so much uncertainty.

We are all suffering the effects of the coronavirus and we're only going to sort it out by working together.

I'm not a medical or any other type of expert and I don't have "the answers". This book is based on my lived experience as a disabled person, who due to health problems has previously self isolated, and I'm going to discuss some of the things that have helped me get through this twice before. This book is not a substitute for professional medical support or advice, so please if you feel unwell seek medical support.

We've already seen with horror the death toll rising, and the number of coronavirus cases rapidly increasing on a daily basis. Social distancing, going out but avoiding crowds and keeping away from other people, on its own does not seem to be effective in slowing down the numbers and many countries have already introduced self isolation.

### Self Isolation

Self isolation is when you and your household are confined to your home. It means you stay at home, you don't go out, that includes not going out to work, school, shops or any other public areas. It means you can't have visitors to your home and you will have to make arrangements for shopping to be delivered and dropped off at your door.

Self isolation is a huge ask but it is done to prevent the spread of the virus and save lives.

This is a time for individual responsibility to keep you, your loved ones, your communities and total strangers safe. It's a massive task so we need to work together as a team if we're going to beat it.

This is going to be tough, it's going to be hard, you're going to miss your daily routine, meeting up with friends and family, you're going to have to cancel your plans, holidays, etc. It's going to feel unfair and frustrating.

Many of you might feel fit, well and invincible and are questioning why you need to go into self isolation. However, you don't know if you are carrying the virus and who you might be affecting. You maybe putting other people in danger, albeit unintentionally, as you might be spreading the virus to older people or those with serious health conditions, who aren't as strong and resilient as you, and may die. When the numbers of people with serious conditions rises there will be less respirators, medical staff and hospital beds available for other patients. So maybe there won't be enough equipment if child or a young adult whose been in a serious accident requires it and the doctors, who are already working hard, are then put in the horrible position of deciding who lives and who dies, by making the impossible decision about who has access to the equipment.

Please act like you already have the virus and don't pass it on to others.

### Strategies to Help You Cope

No one wants to go into self isolation. However, it is something you might end up doing voluntarily or because you have been asked to. I've done it twice before, neither times were easy but they were time limited and I came out the other side ok. I'm going to share tips about what I learnt from my previous experiences. I'm not going to sugar coat it, but I'm going to say things which helped me. You might not like, disagree or find some of the things I say difficult to hear, but I'm not writing them to be liked, I write to try to support you through this unknown and stressful journey.

Please throughout keep remembering self isolation may sometimes feel like an eternity but in reality it should be just a few weeks or months of your life, and when you look back it will only be a small part of your life.

## Acceptance

"Grant me the sincerity to accept the things I can't change, The courage to change the things I can, And the Wisdom to know the difference" - Reinhold Niebuhr

Any type of change is unsettling. Even if it's something you've wanted and planned for such as a moving home, starting a new job or having a baby, it can still feel daunting, it's new, you wonder how you'll manage and if it will be ok.

Sometimes in life change will happen which we don't want. This may happen gradually or suddenly but it is nonetheless unwelcome. The reality is life is random. Both good and bad things can happen to people. Trying to get your head round it and accept it is enormous.

Acceptance is the recognition of the reality of a situation and getting on with it. This doesn't mean it's an easy thing to do or we have to like it. It's about reflecting and acknowledging that at the moment we need to adjust our mindset, and admit that we're going to need to do things differently for a little while. Acceptance isn't being defeatist or giving in; in fact, it shows great strength of character to recognise that things need to change even when you don't want them to.

If you can do it there should be a positive pay off. No amount of wishing things to be different, feeling angry or upset is going to change the situation right now. However, if you can change your mind set so you can better accept the situation it means you should spend less time worrying or resenting the situation. This can then free you up to do something nicer.

Acceptance is a small word which requires a big ask. It's also something you have to keep working at, there will be moments when something happens and all your positivity will fall apart in a moment. Remember you don't have to deal with this on your own, consider getting support maybe from a friend, family member, your religious community, through meditation, etc.

## Adapt

Adaption involves changing your behaviour. It requires a change of habits, daily routine and missing out on the many things you take for granted.

Self isolation requires change on a magnitude you've never been asked to consider before. It makes the will power needed for intensive revision for your exams or going on a diet, appear easy in comparison. It calls for a drastic change in behaviour overnight. So many of the things you have done up to now and taken for granted won't continue for the present.

## Resilience

“Pain has taught me to appreciate the things that don’t hurt.” - Melissa Tripp

Resilience is about how you bounce back from difficult life events and carrying on. This may be how you cope after the death of a loved one or a serious illness. It’s about how you deal with the pain and disappointment. Resilience requires a positive attitude and developing strategies to overcome the setback. Some people who work through their personal difficulties often become more self-aware and are able to learn from their difficult situation. Many have come out of the situation feeling stronger.

Self isolation is going to be extremely stressful for everyone, plus there is the uncertainty about how long this will last, as this a new virus. Be resilient. Whatever happens please adhere to official medical advice and only come out of your home hibernation when scientists believe it is safe to do so and instruct you to.

## Physical Health

The physical health of each member of the household may differ and there may also be pre-existing health conditions or disabilities to consider. While the focus is on the pandemic don’t forget to think about your general health and well-being. If you have pre-existing or develop non virus symptoms make sure you still access the necessary medical support and ensure you have enough of your prescribed medication. Some pharmacy can offer home delivers so it’s worth asking if they can assist.

Take this time to look after your physical health, eat and sleep well. Try to keep active within the home, don’t spend all day on the sofa or on in bed, instead keep mobile by undertaking household chores or exercise. Do a little bit each day so that you remain active and physically fit.

## Emotional Well-Being

A major struggle for many people will be how to maintaining your emotional well-being and keeping positive, while you are confined to the home. You may feel bored, unsettled, isolated or anxious. Even people who see themselves as level headed will from time to time find the situation extremely stressful. Some of you will have current or previous mental health difficulties and being in self isolation may bring additional anxieties for you.

Everyone’s personal circumstances will be different. Some people will be with their families, children while others will be on their own in self isolation. If you’re in a busy household there will be times you crave solitude, you might feel like you want to escape and be on your own. For those who are on their own there will be times when they will crave company.

It’s important to realise whatever your circumstances, you won’t be on your own feeling like this. Being confined to a small space is going to test everyone’s emotional well-being. Try to remain positive and use distraction by keeping busy by doing things you enjoy to take your mind off the situation.

Try to remember these are unprecedented and stressful times and it’s ok not to feel ok. If you have depression or other mental health difficulties please ensure you continue to take your medication as prescribed. However, if the situation is upsetting you please reach out to friends, family or medical professionals to ensure you receive the support you need to help you during this time. Also, if you know someone in your family, friends or community please look out for them.

Reaching out for help if you feel suicidal is particularly important. The Samaritans and other counselling service offer telephone helplines or alternatively contact your local health services.

## **Bereavement**

Sadly, the coronavirus has already resulted in many deaths. While the numbers dying is still relatively low compared to the numbers of people contracting the virus, any life lost is utterly heart-breaking. Realistically there is a fair possibility that you may personally know a person who dies. Death is still an awkward topic for many people to discuss. However, if your loved ones are in a high-risk group try to have a conversation with them now, to try to find out in a what they would like if they became seriously ill or died. These are not easy conversations to have but it will hopefully provide you with a some comfort if your loved one passes on, to know that you are able to carry out their wishes regards to funeral arrangements and their personal affairs.

## **Asking for Help**

Sometimes when we are finding thing hard, we find it difficult to ask for help. This is an extremely stressful and uncertain time and so try not to bottle things up, as it could impact on your mental health. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it's about being self-aware and being able to seek support is important.

## **Routines**

Most people have an established routine of going to work or attending education and regular leisure time. Whether you are working from home during social isolation or not, you will also have leisure time. At first the idea of getting up late, staying up late, not bothering to change into daywear might be a bit of fun. However, this will sooner or later lead to the days all blurring into one. Instead think about creating an informal structure to the day and having some house rules. These might be during the weekdays I will get up and be dressed while you work or study, and pyjama days are only for the weekend.

At the moment no one knows how long the pandemic will last, so think about how you can mark special occasions, birthdays, anniversaries, etc, maybe it will be with a Skype video call or a special meal at home. A bigger celebration can take place at a later date.

## **Essentials - What You Want Versus What You Need**

Essentials are the items we need and truly can't manage without, such as food, drink and prescribed medication. Wants are the things we like, our preferences and while they are thing we enjoy, they are not essential. Alongside this goes quantities and stockpiling. Maybe you're stock piling food and essential items as you're worried about whether or not your family will have enough to eat. Even if your cupboards are full, stockpiling is probably not doing to take away your anxieties or stress about the virus. If you're stockpiling what you are doing is making other people also panic buying, it raises everyone's stress levels and it becomes like a mouse on a wheel, it just goes round and round. Please stop stockpiling now, instead think about what's truly important and focus on only meeting your personal or family's needs.

## **Contact with Others**

Whether you're living on your own or with others it's so important to keep in regular contact with your family and friends outside your household. For those with laptops or smart phones, think about making video calls to friends rather than texting them. This will feel a little more personal than a text or a phone call. Also maintain contact via social media. Sharing a tweet or posting a photo on

Instagram or Facebook will help make you feel contacted with the outside world. Also remember those who don't have access to the internet and ensure that you also keep in contact with them. Maintaining friendship and mutual support is going to be one of the key things which is going to help your emotional wellbeing.

## **Sense of Humour**

During these difficult times try to keep your sense of humour. There are things you're going to find hard to do, and a bit of humour can lighten the mood temporarily and put a smile on people's faces. Whether it's within your household, texting a friend or posting on social media sharing a joke or video clip can spread some joy.

## **Empathy**

Empathy is being able to put yourself in another person's shoes, to appreciate someone else's situation and to understand their feelings. It's the ability to see something from the other person's perspective instead of just your own. Whether you are living on your own or in a busy household, thinking about how others are doing will help you in your interactions. At this time everyone is having less direct interaction with their family and friends and this will lead to many people feeling more anxious, although other people might not show it in the same way you might. Being thoughtful and considerate in your interactions can help to defuse stressful situations but also lead to more enjoyable discussions.

## **Gratitude**

Gratitude is being thankful and showing appreciation. Being stuck at home, missing friends, holidays, feeling bored, etc might make it feel that there isn't much to be thankful for. However, value the little thing, such as a nice cup of tea, a relaxing soak in the bath, an unexpected phone call from a friend, etc. Try to appreciate the things you do. In your households if there is someone else doing the cooking or the washing up, thank them, recognise their hard work and make them feel valued. While the world remains unpredictable, appreciate your friendships and household routines will help to keep you grounded.

## **Acts of Kindness**

The coronavirus has also shown us some of the best in humanity. Whether it be front line medical staff tirelessly risking their own lives to save others, social care staff providing personal care and supporting disabled people with daily tasks, the creative ways communities have found to lift their neighbours spirits by isolated but communal singing, or an unnamed individual who performs a random act of kindness to a stranger.

If we've been in the receiving end of these random acts of kindness, it has lifted our spirits and has been life affirming. Likewise, from the one offering it, it also has a feel-good factor, you feel you've made a connection and that you've done something positive.

The choice is yours, in self isolation think about your interactions in your household, people on the telephone or on social media. We each have the power to lift someone's spirits and in doing so we often also lift our own.

## **Treats**

Treats make you happy. Think about including some in your daily or weekly routines. Whether it's a bar of chocolate, sitting down to your favourite TV show, cooking, etc, build in some special times.

Maybe try to make the most of your time at home on your hobby, learn a new language, make a start on all those books on your bookshelf, do some de-cluttering or D-I-Y. or any of those things you wanted to do but just haven't got round to. Try and turn the negative into an opportunity.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to all the medical and social care staff, cleaners, food delivery people and all the essential service who are working round the clock to keep us safe, provide for our basic needs and who are saving lives. The world owes each one of you a debt of gratitude.

I had planned to self-published this e-book on Amazon but they have said that my book does not comply to their guidelines. This is a free book. If you found it of any value please consider to making a donation to charity or doing a random act of kindness to a person in need.

There are more hard times ahead but each of us can play our own small part in easing it for ourselves and others, by keeping safe and looking out for each other.