

# Social Isolation During a Pandemic, and After



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We must first become  
curious about the nature  
of the problem.



# Social Isolation





# List the Challenges

- Stigma (free and reduced lunches, physical appearance, socio-economic status)
- Technology challenges
- Parent/caregiver fatigue and burnout
- Housing and food insecurity
- Some kids have childcare and household duties (much as an adult)
- Transportation concerns, can't afford bus ticket or don't live close to bus line
- Mental healthcare needs, limited access, stigma, not enough providers to meet the need
- Language differences
- Widening economic gap between wealthy families and families that are struggling
- Students not getting adequate exercise or sleep, increasing anxiety and depression
- All manner of abuse and neglect



**Shannon Fisher, M. Ed.**  
Special Education Teacher, Mathematics

# Common Scenario in Post Acute and Long Term Care Settings

- Rising patient acuity
- Disproportionate reimbursement
- Results in dissatisfaction and high staff turnover
- Impacts quality of care
- Adding to discouragement and demotivation:
  - Federal survey processes that only focus on deficiencies with compliance
  - Media reports biased toward publishing poor outcomes
  - Negative processes (e.g. legislative hearings and lawsuits)
  - All focusing on mistakes




***Arif Nazir, MD, FACP, CMD, AGSF***

Immediate Past President  
American Medical Director's  
Association (AMDA)

"No One Cares When Planes Don't Crash", May 2019

[https://www.jamda.com/article/S1525-8610\(19\)30321-4/fulltext?rss=yes](https://www.jamda.com/article/S1525-8610(19)30321-4/fulltext?rss=yes)



The background is a complex, abstract digital visualization. It features a grid of glowing blue and orange points, with lines connecting them to form a mesh-like structure. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues and vibrant oranges, creating a high-tech, futuristic feel. The text is overlaid on a dark, semi-transparent circular area in the upper left corner.

*Individually, we do  
not have the  
bandwidth to  
address all these  
issues.*

# We can still affect change!

## **Micro** – individual resident/family level

- Staff to screen for trauma
- Providers to screen for trauma
- Refer for assessment and treatment when necessary

## **Mezzo** – facility level

- Facility commitment to operationalize trauma-informed care principles
- Train, mentor and coach staff on TIC practices
- Collaborate with community professionals/experts to provide TIC assessment and treatment
- Affect sustainable culture change



# Emotional and Psychological Trauma

“Result of **extraordinarily stressful events** that shatter your sense of security, making you feel **helpless** in a dangerous world. Often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you **feeling overwhelmed** and **isolated** can result in trauma, even if it doesn’t involve physical harm. The more **frightened and helpless** you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized.”

(emphasis added)





**Dr. Van der Kolk**

Psychiatrist, trauma  
researcher, and author of  
*The Body Keeps the Score:  
Brain, Mind, and Body in  
the Healing of Trauma*

# The Virus is a Pre-Traumatic Condition: Two Core Variables

1. **Immobilization** – cannot move (quarantine, shelter-in-place)
2. **Unpredictability** – not knowing what is going to happen next, cannot say tomorrow will be a different day or the day after

When the world is unpredictable and you cannot move, then the vulnerability to become traumatized is very great.

# Social isolation or Loneliness?

Social isolation is the **objective** physical separation from other people

Loneliness is the **subjective** distressed feeling of being alone or separated

They are different and can exist independently from each other

Losing sense of connection and community changes a person's perception of the world - may feel threatened, mistrustful – which can trigger the biological defense mechanism





**Fight**




**Flight**



**Freeze**

Biological Defense Mechanism

A person with short grey hair and glasses is sitting in a dark metal chair, looking out a window with vertical blinds. The person is wearing a patterned shirt and dark pants. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window on the right.

“We need to identify people who are most prone to suffer from social isolation and loneliness and those who would benefit most from interventions,” said Dr. Pedersen. “Interventions for social isolation may look very different from interventions for those who feel lonely.”

Nancy Pedersen, Ph.D., a professor of genetic epidemiology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden



# Risks Associated with Isolation and Loneliness

High blood pressure

Heart disease

Obesity

Weakened immune system

Anxiety

Depression

Cognitive decline

Alzheimer's disease

Death



# Touch Starvation (skin hunger)



- Physical contact is limited or eliminated
- Instinctively, we want to touch someone, but we can't do it because of the fear associated with the pandemic
- Touch starvation increases stress, depression and anxiety, triggering a cascade of negative physiological effects
- Can increase heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and muscle tension, and suppress the digestive system and immune system leading to increased risk of infection
- Can lead to PTSD

Touch starvation is a consequence of COVID-19's physical distancing,  
<https://www.tmc.edu/news/2020/05/touch-starvation/>



Do we believe that once we can touch, hug and hold people again that the negative effects of isolation and touch starvation will 'disappear'?





**Edward Machtinger, MD**

*Professor of Medicine*

*Director, Women's HIV Program*

*University of California, San Francisco*

“My framework for thinking about this is that there are two pandemics – one caused by the virus and the other caused by the trauma and stress associated with the pandemic.”

<https://www.chcs.org/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-is-highlighting-the-importance-of-trauma-informed-care-qa-with-dr-edward-machtinger/>



# After a Disaster, We See Increased...

- Morbidity and mortality
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide
- Substance use
- Overdose
- Violence
- Heart attacks
- Strokes
- More...





Predictable second wave of death after exposure to mass trauma.



# Primary Care PTSD Screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5)

In the past month, have you ...

1. had nightmares about the event(s) or thought about the event(s) when you did not want to?	YES	NO
2. tried hard not to think about the event(s) or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of the event(s)?	YES	NO
3. been constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?	YES	NO
4. felt numb or detached from people, activities, or your surroundings?	YES	NO
5. felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for the event(s) or any problems the events may have caused?	YES	NO
<b>Total score is sum of "YES" responses in items 1-5.</b>	<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	



# Supplement to the PC-PTSD-5

Provided courtesy of  
Barbara Ganzel PhD, LMSW  
Director, Gerontology Institute  
Ithaca College

## Box 3.9

### DELAYED REACTION TO TRAUMA Signs & Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress

**Possible Delayed Emotional Reactions** YES/ NO source \_\_\_\_\_

Irritability; Aggression; Negative affect; Distress at trauma reminders; Fear of trauma happening again; Negative thoughts about self; Detachment; Feelings of vulnerability; Mood swings; Grief reactions.

**Possible Delayed Physical Reactions** YES/ NO source \_\_\_\_\_

Nightmares; sleep disturbance; Hypervigilance/Heightened startle; Persistent fatigue; Changes in appetite or digestion or cortisol levels; Lowered immune function/more colds and infections; Focus on aches and pains

**Possible Delayed Cognitive Reactions** YES/ NO source \_\_\_\_\_

Intrusive memories; Flashbacks; Exaggerated self-blame or blame of others about the event(s); Difficulty concentrating; Belief that avoidance or other behaviors will protect them from trauma; Avoidance of trauma-related feelings or memories or preoccupation with the event; Panic & phobia-like behavior in response to trauma triggers; Inability to remember key features of the trauma

**Possible Delayed Behavioral Reactions** YES/ NO source \_\_\_\_\_

Avoidance of event reminders ; Decreased interest in activities; Risky or destructive behavior; Isolation/withdrawal; Disrupted social relationships; History of abuse of alcohol or drugs

**Possible Delayed Existential Reactions** YES/ NO source \_\_\_\_\_

Questioning ("why me"), disillusionment, cynicism; Loss of purpose or faith; Hopelessness; Also potential adaptive responses such as re-establishing priorities, redefining meaning and importance of life, reviewing life assumptions to accommodate trauma.

Adapted from HHS (2014). *TIP-57*, pp. 61-62.



What are the  
unmet needs?

## Needs

### Physical well-being

air  
food  
water  
shelter  
protection  
(emotional)  
safety  
movement  
rest  
sleep  
touch  
sexual  
expression  
health  
comfort  
warmth

### Harmony

peace  
tranquility  
relaxation  
beauty  
order  
ease  
predictability  
familiarity  
stability  
balance  
completion  
wholeness

### Autonomy

choice  
freedom  
time  
space  
independence

### Power

self-esteem  
confidence  
dignity  
inner power  
empowerment  
competence  
effectiveness

### Pleasure

to celebrate  
to mourn  
flow  
humor  
laughter  
vitality  
challenge  
stimulation

### Connection

collaboration  
reciprocity  
communication  
company  
to belong  
durability  
continuity  
to give  
to receive  
to see / to be seen  
to hear / to be heard  
to understand  
to be understood

### Liveliness

to discover  
adventure  
passion  
spontaneity  
play

### Authenticity

honesty  
integrity  
transparency  
openness  
self-expression

### Meaning

to learn  
growth  
to contribute  
to enrich life  
hope  
creativity  
inspiration  
purpose  
clarity  
awareness  
liberation  
transformation  
to matter  
participate  
to be present  
simplicity

### Love and attention

love  
compassion  
care  
attention  
acceptance  
appreciation  
reassurance  
affection  
trust  
involvement  
respect  
care  
support  
nearness  
intimacy  
tenderness  
softness  
sensitivity  
friendliness





## Feelings when my needs are fulfilled

### Physical feelings

relaxed  
comfortable  
energetic  
centered  
balanced  
big  
soft  
strong  
lively  
in flow  
full  
free

### Well-rested

refreshed  
restored  
recharged  
awake  
alert

### Peaceful

calm  
quiet  
bright  
zen  
at ease  
relieved  
serene  
carefree  
unconcerned

### Satisfied

fulfilled  
satisfied  
content

### Cheerful

happy  
amused  
joyous  
cheerful  
delighted  
ecstatic

### Enthusiastic

excited  
adventurous  
playful  
lively  
eager  
passionate  
thrilled  
radiant

### Loving

tender  
warm  
openhearted  
compassionate  
friendly  
sympathetic  
touched

### Thankful

grateful  
moved  
touched

### Amazed

surprised  
flabbergasted

### Hopeful

heartened  
encouraged  
desirous  
optimistic

### Curious

fascinated  
interested  
engaged  
involved  
inspired

### Confident

resolute  
confident  
powerful  
open  
proud  
safe

## Feelings when my needs are not fulfilled



### Physical feelings

pain  
limp  
empty  
small  
smothered  
short of breath  
tense  
wretched  
sick

### Sad

disappointed  
dispirited  
melancholic  
depressed  
down  
gloomy  
desirous  
nostalgic

### Regret

guilty  
repentance

### Worried

tense  
nervous  
anxious

### Pain

hurt  
lonely  
wretched  
mourning

### Vulnerable

fragile  
uncertain  
sensitive

### Tired

defeated  
burnt-out  
exhausted  
sleepy  
weary

### Withdrawn

bored  
detached  
isolated  
alienated  
apathetic  
cold  
numb  
impatient

### Ashamed

guilty  
embarrassed  
shy

### Desperate

helpless  
hopeless  
powerless  
uncertain

### Skeptical

torn  
lost  
bewildered  
perplexed  
confused

### Scared

afraid  
suspicious  
panic  
paralyzed  
startled  
anxious

### Uncomfortable

troubled  
nervous  
restless  
uncertain  
insecure

### Envious

jealous

### Shocked

startled  
upset  
surprised  
disturbed  
alert  
panic  
overwhelmed

### Frustrated

irritated  
annoyed  
impatient  
embittered  
irritable

### Rage

angry  
mad  
upset  
furious  
resentful

### Hate

hostile  
aversion  
bitter  
loathing  
contempt



## Social Isolation Needs to be Included in Ongoing Disaster Planning

- Emotional, psychological and physical distress will continue, even when the pandemic “ends”
- Adopting and sustaining a culture of TIC is crucial
- What issues/challenges can we anticipate as we begin re-entry into “usual” community life?
- What do we need to be prepared for?

# Process Improvement

## Trauma informed care task force





# Process Improvement Project (PIP) Idea

## Video calls and other technology

- What is the process in your facility? Scheduling? Oversight? Devices? Infection control?
- What are the barriers?
- What works?
- Conversation starters to help facilitate a rewarding experience (name the grief *and* elicit smiles, laughter, new shared experiences)
- What to do if the resident becomes distressed or confused?



The pivotal change we are talking must be  
INGRAINED culture change, not just adding a  
screening tool to a list of tasks or putting a  
generic care plan on the chart.

We need sustainable culture change, not just the  
“culture of the pandemic.”



# Invitation to Brave Space



Micky ScottBey Jones  
“The Justice Doula”

## *Invitation to Brave Space* by Micky ScottBey Jones

Together we will create *brave space*  
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space”  
We exist in the real world  
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.  
In this space  
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,  
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,  
We call each other to more truth and love  
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.  
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.  
We will not be perfect.  
This space will not be perfect.  
It will not always be what we wish it to be  
but  
*It will be our brave space together,  
and  
We will work on it side by side*





Thank you for  
your time.

*Paige*