

## **Anderson County Hospital's Senior Life Solutions program offers tips to cope with anxiety and isolation during COVID-19 pandemic**

*Garnett, Ks. (April 23, 2020)* — Americans of all ages are experiencing increased social isolation and loneliness in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the National Institute on Aging, nearly 14 million older adults in the U.S. live alone and are especially vulnerable during this time. Their research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death. Anderson County Hospital's Senior Life Solutions program is encouraging people to engage in meaningful, productive activities to help boost mood and maintain their overall emotional health and well-being.

"It is important to find ways to connect and engage in activities to help mitigate symptoms of anxiety and depression during this time," said Beth Anderson, BSN, RN, Program Director, ACH Senior Life Solutions. "We put together these quick tips to share with our communities and hope they will encourage self-care and support."

### **Quick Tips for Older Adults Experiencing Social Isolation**

1. Find or keep a sense of purpose. Take up a hobby such as growing an herb garden, crossword puzzles, knitting, or other activities.
2. Age-appropriate workouts can help you not only stay in physical shape but in mental shape as well. Gentle exercises such as walking are suggested. It is always recommended to consult a healthcare professional or primary care physician first.
3. Manage medication. Do you have enough to last you for the next 30-60 days? If you need help managing medications, contact your doctor or a loved one who can help you.
4. Keep a routine that includes consistent sleep/wake cycles. Incorporate talking to family or friends in that routine. Whether it be writing them a letter or calling them on the phone.

### **Quick Tips for Families**

1. Stay active, and do it together! Walk the family dog, take a bike ride, or a walk together.
2. If your church has temporarily closed, check-in with them to see if they are offering virtual services that your family can attend together from home.
3. If you have kids home from school, make a video (on your smartphone!) and send it to a loved one who lives far away, which is a fun interactive way to simply say, hello.

### **Quick Tips for Caregivers**

1. Take five to refuel. Make a list of things that help you relax and take two to three breaks throughout the day.
2. Call or write a friend who can lend a sympathetic ear, make you laugh, and remind you that you are not alone.
3. Pursue other interests. Hobbies, sports, crafts, and other pursuits are not frivolous. They help you clear your mind of worry – if only briefly.

### **How to Care for Yourself**

1. Nourish your body. Ensure you are eating a balanced diet and drinking plenty of water. If produce is hard to come by right now, check to see if local farmer's markets are delivering.

2. Take a break from the news. Although it is important to stay updated, it is recommended to take at least a 15-minute break.
3. Stay connected to your loved ones or a mentor using your phone, or applications like Facetime or Skype to speak to them virtually.

“Think of self-care like putting on an oxygen mask on an airplane,” Anderson added. “The flight attendant always instructs travelers to put on their own mask before securing others. You must take care of yourself right now to continue caring for and supporting those around you.”

If you or a loved one is in need, contact the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline (800) 985-5990 that provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Additionally, older adults and adults living with disabilities can contact the Institute on Aging’s 24-hour toll-free Friendship Line, an accredited crisis line at 800-971-0016. If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, go to your nearest emergency room or dial 911.

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