

SENIORS

Spotting the Signs: Loneliness and Isolation in Older Adults

NewsUSA

(NU) - While the holiday season can be a busy and hectic time for many, it presents the perfect opportunity to reconnect with family and friends. But with the presence of COVID-19, holiday plans may look different this year as many families host virtual celebrations or small gatherings with increased safety measures.

Regardless of how the holidays are celebrated, they are still an ideal time to check in on the health and well-being of older loved ones, especially during this particularly isolating time. Even though many of us may not see our loved ones in person over the holidays, virtual platforms are making it easier than ever to stay connected.

While not being able to come together to celebrate holidays and major life milestones isn't new for 2020, the impacts of isolation and loneliness are still very real, particularly for the aging population. As social distancing remains necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19, many are feeling the effects on their physical and mental health. In fact, earlier this year more than half of older adults (56 percent) reported feeling isolated from others compared to 27 percent in 2018, according to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging.

"The rise in feelings of loneliness and isolation in older adults over the last several months is alarming," says Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D., gerontologist and caregiver advocate for Home Instead®. "While home remains the safest place for seniors this holiday season, it'll be more important than ever to stay connected with your loved ones and pay close attention to any changes to their personality or behavior."

So whether you are celebrating the holidays virtually or practicing a socially distant get-together, here are a few signs that could indicate that your loved one may be experiencing the effects of this crisis and could benefit from a helping



hand and more consistent companionship:

- **Lack of Communication.** Have they lost interest in socializing, either virtually or in person? Do they repeat themselves or struggle to find the right words? Do they forget what they are saying mid-sentence?

- **Varying Moods.** Have you noticed any recent changes in their attitude? Do they seem easily flustered or unusually sad? Are they leaving voicemails or sending text messages that seem out of the ordinary?

- **Changes in Appearance.** Do their clothes seem rumpled or unwashed? Is their hair unkempt? Have they gained or lost a noticeable amount of weight?

- **Difficulty Concentrating.** Do they seem disengaged or restless? Are they having difficulty keeping up with conversations? Do they appear to have trouble hearing or ask for details to be repeated?

- **Memory Loss.** Are they having difficulty remembering names of family and friends? Have they forgotten recent events? Do they seem confused or overwhelmed?

Acknowledging these signs may be difficult for both family members and older adults, but accepting that your loved one may need additional help early on will increase the likelihood they can continue to age safely and comfortably in their home for years to come.

For additional tips or to learn more about temporary or long-term care options, contact your local Home Instead office or visit www.homeinstead.com.