

My Emergency Preparedness Guide

How to Identify an Isolated Individual in the Home and How/Where to Report



The Role of the Home Care Provider when Encountering an Isolated Individual or Helping Family Members Identify and Engage with a Family Member Who is Isolated

The work of the home care or direct care provider requires an attentive awareness of a patient's condition and situation. The direct care provider plays a vital part in the development of a care plan. The care plan is key to determining that patients get the appropriate level of care.

Although home care providers often become their patients' links with outside services and their care team, they are not permitted to make decisions about patient care. But they can be looking for signs of neglect, isolation, hiding illnesses, or other issues for people who do not want to be removed from their homes but cannot care for themselves.

What is Self-Neglect?

The Maryland Department of Aging defines self-neglect as "involves the failure of a person to meet vital self-care needs, which puts them at risk of harm to their safety and/or health."

What are the Signs of Self-Neglect and Isolation?

There are several signs to look for to determine if someone is not taking care of themselves and not letting others, such as family or healthcare professionals, assist.

For additional information, visit the [Maryland Department of Aging](#) online or call 410-767-1100 or 800-243-3425.

The AARP Foundation lists four signs that a person may be isolated:

- Deep boredom, general lack of interest and withdrawal
- Losing interest in personal hygiene
- Poor eating and nutrition
- Significant disrepair, clutter and hoarding in the house

What to Do About Isolation

While solitude can be healthy, aging while truly alone is not. Steps the direct care worker can take if they are concerned about the well-being of a patient are:

- Notify management and nursing staff at the agency of their concerns
- Notify family members of their concerns
- Work with the family physician
- Alert Social Services, Maryland Department of Aging, in cases of severe neglect or if there are no family members or community support systems for the person

An additional resource is the UCLA Loneliness Scale. It can be used to walk the patient through a series of questions which might help both you and the patient realize how much isolation is impacting them. You can also work with the family to ask the questions of their family member. The results should be reviewed with the person's physician, family members, others as needed.

Instructions

Using a 4-point rating scale (1 = never; 4 = always), participants answer 20 questions, such as "How often do you feel left out?" and "How often do you feel part of a group of friends?" Researchers later reverse-code the positively worded items so that high values mean more loneliness, and then calculate a score for each respondent by averaging their ratings.

Response Format

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Always

1. I feel in tune with the people around me?
2. I lack companionship?
3. There is no one I can turn to?
4. I do not feel alone?
5. I feel part of a group of friends?
6. I have a lot in common with the people around me?

7. I am no longer close to anyone?
8. My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me?
9. I am an outgoing person?
10. There are people I feel close to?
11. I feel left out?
12. My social relationships are superficial?
13. No one really knows me well?
14. I feel isolated from others?
15. I can find companionship when I want it?
16. There are people who really understand me?
17. I am unhappy being so withdrawn?
18. People are around me but not with me?
19. There are people I can talk to?
20. There are people I can turn to?

Link to the online test here: <https://artemciy.gitlab.io/loneliness-scale/#/>

Add up the response to each question. A score of 44 and more can be considered "officially lonely".

Source: <https://sparqtools.org/mobility-measure/ucla-loneliness-scale-version-3/>

More Information and Online Resources

- Preventing Elder Abuse and Neglect: Know the Facts and What To Do If You Suspect Abuse. Maryland Department of Aging. <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/elder-abuse-prevention.aspx#:~:text=This%20includes%20not%20providing%20essential,their%20safety%20and%2For%20health>
- The Danger of Social Isolation-How to spot it, fight it and prevent it, David Frank, AARP, July 3, 2018. <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2018/social-isolation-symptoms-danger.html>preparedness.health.maryland.gov
- Self-Neglect. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services/self-neglect>.
- Direct Care Workers Can Address Social Isolation and Loneliness, Robert Espinoza, March 2, 2020. <http://phinational.org/direct-care-workers-can-help-address-social-isolation-and-loneliness/>
- Where You Live Matters, ASHA. <http://phinational.org/direct-care-workers-can-help-address-social-isolation-and-loneliness/>

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WRITE THE NAME AND PHONE NUMBER OF YOUR HOME CARE/HOSPICE COMPANY IN THIS BOX.