



## The mental health risks of isolation – and how we can help each other

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Even before ‘social distancing’, research showed that more than a quarter of older people living alone have a mental health condition, and are 50% more likely to go to A&E than those who live with someone else.

This week Mel Lacy ([@lacymel](#)), the Director of Growing Young Disciples and Director of Youth & Children’s ministry at Oak Hill London wrote a thread of really helpful tweets on the impact of isolation on single people. Used with permission, here are some of the points she raised, and how they could be taken into account for older people:

1. Check in with them. Ask questions that show you know them and care for them. **Don’t assume someone else is already doing this.** There are some thoughts on [questions to ask here](#).
2. Invite them to join a meal online with you so you can sit, eat and chat together. This is a great idea for older people with some kind of device. You will want to give good advance warning and make sure they have their device set up so that it is secure with the best volume and position you can manage.
3. Coordinate watching movies or a TV programme together. Elderly people are more likely to stick to the TV timetable. But perhaps avoid the news! What do they most enjoy watching right now? Ask and watch it with them.
4. Decide to read the same book, and plan a call to talk about it. Sometimes a book group works well with two people over the phone.
5. Mel suggests sending something through the post: “a little note, a child’s drawing or a little gift of their favourite chocolate. Think carefully about what helps them to feel known and seen.” Think about shared memories. Nostalgia can be a helpful distraction from a painful present.
6. Don’t be afraid to ask if they are okay financially. Some are still used to collecting their pension from the post office. We are not good at talking about money. Asking the question gives permission for it to be discussed, even if not immediately.
7. Share moments of your day. There are some great devices like the Nixplay photo frames which mean you can send photos to a ‘digital photo frame’ straight from your phone to someone who doesn’t have email.



8. Mel finishes with this advice: "Love them! In as many practical, digital and prayer ways as possible. Help them to love you! Ask them to help you, to pray for you and resource you in many and different ways."

Remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint. As **1 John 3:18** says: "*Let us love one another not in word and speech, but in action and in truth.*"