

## The Effects of Social Distancing on New Parents

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Social distancing will be exceptionally hard for many new parents faced with enforced separation and isolation in the coming weeks and months. The impact of loneliness on psychological health and wellbeing is huge and cannot be overstated. It can lead to unhappiness, anxiety, stress, disrupted sleep, and reduced resistance to infection. It can also trigger postnatal depression. It is vitally important that new parents talk to other people if they feel lonely, lost or depressed.



Caring for a new baby, dealing with a difficult delivery, caesarean section or incomplete recovery after childbirth can be challenging. Parents need as much support as they can get during this period of social isolation. Even if the healthcare services are disrupted, new parents should check in regularly with friends and family, or join an online support group, which can provide a source of help and relieve the feeling of being alone. A text message or telephone call can make all the difference to mental health, recovery, and wellbeing.



It takes a village to raise a child, but if the village no longer exists, it is important for new parents to join supportive networks and community groups online, and to talk to friends and family as regularly as possible to protect against isolation, loneliness, and depression. It may take some effort for new parents to join an online group, but the more they do it, the easier it will become. Although new parents can interact on a Facebook group, nothing

replaces face-to-face visual interactions or real conversations, which give immediate feedback.

No one really knows how long the lockdown will last, so it's essential to stay connected. Multiple platforms that can be utilised from home include mobile phones, tablets, desktop PCs, Zoom and Skype. Visual platforms can offer a vital life-line to new parents. Here, they can forge new relationships with other likeminded parents, feel energised, share problems, ideas, experiences, and fun conversations. These visual interactive platforms can make parents feel part of a community, and the world too.

Loneliness can strike anyone at any time, but new mums are at an increased risk of poor physical and emotional health if they don't have a strong social network in place. New mothers isolated at home are especially at risk of postnatal depression following the birth of their baby. If new mums feel low, lethargic, utterly exhausted, unhappy or wretched, professional support and treatment are crucial. It can take a long time to recover from postnatal depression, but early treatment can reduce the length of suffering and its severity.



In the current situation, it may not be possible for a one-to-one appointment, but regular telephone or video conversations with a healthcare professional can provide an effective form of support. Fresh air, sunshine, exercise, breathing deeply, listening to calming music, and talking daily to family and friends over the telephone, facetime, Zoom or Skype can also help to speed up recovery.