



# ISOLATION



aletheia  
OCTOBER 2020



# aletheia

[A-LAY-THEE-UH]

(n.) *truth, disclosure*

(greek)

## ABOUT US

Aletheia is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High's Reality Check and Monta Vista's Verdadera, Aletheia was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and/or taboo issues within the Lynbrook community. Each issue of the publication comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month's theme, and other resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized issues are published and distributed to the school. Past issues may be found on our website, under Archives.

The content in Aletheia is composed by the students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and thoughts expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by the school administration or staff.

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## *Student Submissions*

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\*All submissions were submitted anonymously. Note that the views of the submissions do not necessarily reflect the views of Aletheia or of Lynbrook High School\*

Isolation feels like sh\*t. it's hard to connect with friends and you really have to try very hard to not be lonely.

texting one-liners every 4 hours isn't a conversation. i feel like my friends (the few that i have o.O) and i are becoming far distanced. it's inevitable. video calls are fun but im just sick of them. im glad i live with other people so there's always someone to talk to, though. to help with isolation i've been trying to respond to texts as soon as possible. i really took making new friends from the people i sat next to in class for granted. school was my main way of socializing and now that's taken away.

Does social distancing mean emotional distancing? No, I don't think it should. Just because you are not able to be near someone doesn't mean you don't have to care for them. I think that even before COVID-19, we still cared for people we could not see. Would you stop loving a family member because you can't visit them in a hospital because



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they have a seriously fatal cancer? Would you stop loving a family member because you can't visit them in a hospital because they have a seriously fatal cancer? Would you stop caring for your neighbors because they caught COVID? Churches ask for donations to help people in countries that need it that they haven't even met. Did isolation affect you mentally or emotionally? Did it change your relationships? Of course. Now I have to wear a mask everywhere. Now if I go somewhere I wonder, am I safe, does anyone here have COVID? I haven't seen some of my family members in a while because I can't travel to where they live. I can only hang out with my friends if we aren't in each others houses. I am afraid if I say more people will know who I am. I am afraid of even what I have already said. I can't even go to church because they closed the building down until COVID is over. This is how COVID-19 has changed my life. think about how it has changed yours, and ask yourself this, "what can I do to free myself of isolation without breaking the shelter in place rules?". Can you think of an answer?- Anonymous person who cares for everyone.



I would say that social distancing is simultaneously a blessing and a curse. it is a blessing because I get to circumvent any interactions with people I dislike using the extenuation of "social distancing," like Eric Cartman in the Pandemic Special of South Park. Yet it is a curse because I avert social interaction with the people I do like, and my mental health which was already at a fallible level has deteriorated at alarming rates during the lockdown. I already had some depression due to me being different due to me having thoughts and visions on how to change the world that are considered impossible. Yet I keep trying to prove myself to society, which is why my mental health has deteriorated. Before, I was able to talk about my thoughts to friends at middle school, yet now, I have no real assistance with mental health.

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**D**uring COVID-19, I have felt really isolated from everyone. I have friends, but I know my closest don't see me as close as I see them. I've been going through periods of ups and down when it comes to controlling my level of isolation. During the beginning of school shutting down to COVID-19 in March, I was in a group of people for a few months until I recognized I disliked a number of people in the group and decided to leave. It was too toxic of an environment for me. After leaving the group, I was emotionally alone for two to three months. It really took a toll on who I am as a person and my personality. I understand that social distancing doesn't necessarily mean emotional distancing, but because I'm so used to emotionally distancing myself, it feels more comfortable because I always reflect back to my fears of losing the new friends that I've grown to care about.

Especially during the beginning of COVID-19, I began to feel lonely because my happiness used to depend a lot on my friends and talking to people everyday, and now I couldn't see people everyday at school physically. And then, you know, I met that group who I ended up leaving in a few months.



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Especially during the beginning of COVID-19, I began to feel lonely because my happiness used to depend a lot on my friends and talking to people everyday, and now I couldn't see people everyday at school physically. And then, you know, I met that group who I ended up leaving in a few months.

I ended up talking to these two boys at \* who were best friends. We basically played video games everyday in the evening, and we began to click really well and have fun.

I ended up talking to only one of them more than the other, and we began to play a lot more. And yeah, I ended up developing feelings. We talked almost everyday, and we eventually began face timing each other. Then my parents decided to take my phone and started incorporating

crazy screen times that affected the way I was communicating with my friends. I'm not addicted to my phone. It's because it's my only source of communication to talk with my friends, and you still need to communicate online to set-up plans anyway. So yeah, after I didn't have my phone, we couldn't face time as much in the evening anymore, and we began to gradually fall distant. I began to make

myself more available in desperation to talk to him, and eventually he completely lost interest in me. He began talking to his friends from schools a lot more, and basically began to ignore me as a person. Reflecting on this and spending my energy on someone who I liked for one-and-a-half months, since then I've been really scared to put my emotional energy into anyone. I have friends who I do care about, but in the back of my head, I'm always wondering whether they're going to lose interest and

leave me for someone else. I feel like I'm not close to anyone who is close to me, and I'm already too scared to make that commitment to someone anyway.

I've met someone new during quarantine, and I still keep thinking about when our friendship could just die out and end.

**"I feel like I'm not close to anyone who is close to me, and I'm already too scared to make that commitment to someone anyway."**



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He's a really sweet person, but I keep having the fear that he has other people in mind who he could emotionally detach me for. I do have feelings for him, and that's why I do worry a lot. Next year he's going to college, so that's something that I also would have to consider, too. He's such a nice person, but I thought that way with everyone in that group of friends I was talking to and when I was talking to those two boys. And yeah, I genuinely wonder when our nice friendship is just going to die out and completely diminish itself, leaving me with the pain of knowing that all my efforts to have a great friendship were never worth anything in the first place.

This isolation has affected me a lot. Especially when COVID-19 began at the end of the school year, I had terrible grades in that part of my semester. After leaving the group of friends, I felt hopeless and had no motivation to do my work. I slacked off and completely fell

behind. I was trying to do things during the day to keep my mind off of my problems (NOT DRUGS OR ALCOHOL) of not having my homework done, and I just stopped caring about my grades. My parents started getting continuous emails about how I was not finishing any of my assignments, and I tried to check my mom's emails 24/7 to delete any emails that related to me not finishing my work. This school year, however, I have gotten used to the emotional distancing from people, and it doesn't bother me as much anymore. My days are dull and lonely, but at least they are predictable and can't become predictably worse.

I believe isolation is rather the emotional isolation from your friends and family. You can be isolated whether you are in school or at home without physical contact. I do believe, however, that there are more people who are isolated than not isolated without physical contact rather than physical



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contact where you can interact with everyone in a physical environment. It's also interesting how people think I have lots of friends. I remember I was talking about us in quarantine and how I had almost no friends and was lonely almost everyday, and my friend was so surprised and, in a way, randomly assumed that I had tons of friends to talk to during quarantine. Yeah, I don't.

Isolation has affected me mentally and emotionally. It's rather changed my personality, and I don't know whether the changes will be reversible when I come back to school. I used to be really outgoing and extroverted, and I depended on social interaction for a level of happiness in my life. I feel that I don't rely much on social interaction anymore for my happiness, however, I don't feel that there are any goals in my life that I'm trying to near in the future. I feel that I look at everything day-by-day, not looking forward a few months or years from now. I don't feel like I have goals for my life. My relationships



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have been almost severed due to quarantine, and I feel that I'm not close to anyone anymore. The people who I say I am close to--we barely talk anyway. I'm in a discord server with those two boys, some of the people in that older group prior to meeting the two boys, and a lot of their friends from their school. I don't feel



# "Being isolated has changed my views, priorities, and values."



that I'm really included in anything. They're in a discord server with people from their school, and there's only one person from my school of which we aren't even close anyway.

Recently, I've been writing to keep myself occupied. I've also been a lot in forums and opinion-related websites where you can see polls and what people think. That really interests me a lot. I don't play video games as much, but I still do every once in a while. I've also tried a little bit of programming, so we'll see what happens there, I guess. I'm currently not addicted to anything, though. When I was in the down part of where I didn't have any friends to talk to, I used to find something that I would look forward to doing everyday and basically become addicted to it. I think that it's nice that I'm growing even though I'm in a down part of my life, and I'm not super addicted to something to completely distract me of the things that bother me.

Being isolated has changed my views, priorities, and values. I've noticed that my priorities have really just been my school work. It's dry, but at the same time, it's completely predictable. Having friends around you almost everyday is not always predictable--it only takes one action to be exaggerated and dramatized for you to lose your group of friends the following week and ruin all of the relationships that you had been carefully crafting over the number of months of knowing them. I've also learned to let people do what they



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want, whether it harms their body or not. Before, I used to be a mom to everyone and if something was doing harm to themselves and didn't know any better, I felt it was my initiative to help them and make it stop. However, all they did was push me back and humiliate me. Although I don't agree with what they're doing, I've learned to just keep my mouth shut for the sake of less drama. And yeah, I feel like I've changed completely since March. I used to be far more naive, and although I am probably still naive, after the amount of pain and experience throughout the last few months, I've become more reserved, I've been thinking more about what I say before I proceed to say it, but in a way, I've also lost the fun side to me. I used to be outgoing and fun to talk to. I feel that after quarantine, I feel almost forced to talk. I feel that I'm not as bubbly and fun and interesting to talk to because if I was, why did I lose so many friends over this period of time? I just don't know. I guess time only progresses to learn more about your future. I guess that's just going to be the end of my response.

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I have a teacher who doesn't care really if you have your camera on most of the class will turn on the black screen instead. When we go into group discussions, it's way easier to talk because without camera on I'm not afraid to be judged by my tablemates I don't know at all. And I got to know a lot of other people by their voice and I think it's really warm to be able to laugh and talk and learn without worrying. So it's isolated because all we see is a black screen, but I find it really comforting this way.

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"It's way easier to talk because .. i'm not afraid to be judged"



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I've suffered with depression for years. I've also been unable to go on medication, get therapy, or even speak to my parents about my issues. Having depression is an isolating experience in itself, but being unable to get treated is even more isolating. When COVID-19 started and we went online, my ability to see other people plummeted. For these last 7 months, I haven't spoken to anyone but one friend of mine. I feel horribly isolated and alone every day, but at the same time, I don't have the energy to talk to others. Now, we're in school, but it's online, and teachers just seem to not care about us anymore. We get assigned weeks' worth of homework every day, we have multiple tests a week or even on the same day. They don't take into consideration how terrible our mental

health is, how much harder it is now for us to get into college, and how isolated we feel. It's a vicious cycle- I feel isolated so I am unable to understand what we are learning. With my inability to understand what we're learning comes a feeling of stupidity, and at Lynbrook, feeling stupid is one of the most isolating experiences there is.

H ighschool is the epitome of isolation. you drift apart from friends, f\*cking APs and classes make you study harder, everyone gotta get a niche and be 'unique' so some f\*cking college will take them. The fakery is ridiculous.



# TEACHER INTERVIEW

WITH KRUK

*During COVID-19, specifically, how isolated have you been/felt? What have you been doing to control that level of isolation?*

Hmm, I have felt like the virus. That's how I have felt.

I do live alone. And I could go in the summer, like months on end, without talking to anyone. I probably could come out of myself, or get out of the deep end of the pool and try to engage socially with people, but I don't feel the nagging to do that. I mean, I guess I feel lonely, I feel a little bit isolated, but I also know that I don't want to do the work and I'm so content just to be a creator.

And then I allow myself, like, this weekend, my family's coming down to be with me. So I allow myself to know that that's happening in the future. And that gives me something to really look forward to.

I bought myself a hot tub about three years ago now and that's so nice and that helps. Because I do that at the crack of dawn, when I wake up in the morning, I just go jump in the hot tub. Sometimes I'll do it at night, too. That's really peaceful for me; I just really like the quiet.

I really do like the quiet. But that's hard for me because as a school teacher, I'm balanced by having such a noisy day. So, to come home to the quiet is really peaceful. But in this COVID situation, I'm a little lopsided, because I'm just sort of like talking to myself, which feels super awkward.

I also hate technology so much, that I'm not just like, "oh my gosh, let's Zoom everybody!" I have so much work that the work is like triple fold what it normally would be, and I bring my computer home and I can't make myself pull it out of the bag. It's like a joke. I shouldn't even unplug it from the school because I pretty much can't make myself turn it on.



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And so in the early part of COVID, I did do some of those Zoom things because more people were doing it. I zoomed with this group that I went to Egypt with and it was just kind of cool to see everyone again. And then I have this group of Lynbrook Viking alumni teachers, and they're all retired now, but the choir teacher and I still meet with them. And they're just like the wisest ladies. It's really cool to kind of get together with them, and so in the beginning, we were zooming like, every weekend, and then it became like, oh my gosh! So then it became every other weekend, and now I find that I'm really only drawn to be there around once a month; I don't enjoy sitting still. When I am sitting still, I'm doing something like creating, I'm making some kind of artwork.

And that for me, that time when I'm creating artwork, I don't feel isolated. I don't feel alone. There are moments where I have felt more isolated and felt a more longing, but then it sort of just disappears. Maybe a little bit of class is like therapy for me; you guys are just allowing me to kind of vomit out all the head. And that part just feels kind of like I guess I'm okay because they're not calling mental health on me.

But I think you know, so long as you're aware of it [isolation], I guess it's not a problem and it's like there are things that I could be doing and I'm not actively doing them. Instead, I'm just engaging with creativity and allowing that to fill the void on the emptiness. We have a lot of societal pressures that tell us that we should be in community and so I think some of that some of that's a weird peer pressure that makes us feel like, "oh, I have to be on Instagram", "I have to be posting", "I have to everyone has to see what I'm up to". And so I go through these little binges, but I actually haven't posted it a really long time. And then I'm feeling like, oh, does anybody miss me?

It allows me to actively find my values. And I'm not swayed so much by the viewpoints of others. I think I can feel more spiritual. Being alone, I feel more at peace. I don't have other people's drama kind of nagging at me. So, I do love my solitude. I just don't feel alone, I guess I feel a real spiritual presence. And I feel a real connection with that. Once in a while, I'm like, oh, I should have a boyfriend. My friends are like, oh, well, you know, all your problems will be solved if you just had a boyfriend and I'm like, actually, you know what you're not right. So you know, I'm 49. Now I've been through many life installments of having a partner and having a mate. And there are benefits to that. But I also don't like the added drama and the baggage. And at my age, it's really hard to meet a solid human being; they're pretty messed up.

*In general, do you think isolation changes your views? Priorities? Values?*



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*Does isolation change your relationships? If so, how?*

I kind of just stay to myself. I have my little shelter. I have a good core group of my high school girlfriends who I'm nothing like, but they still reel me in every now and again, and then I'm like, "oh, here I am. I'm here." Then my family's really connected. My sister's a little bit more noisy. She'll text me once a week or something like that. And my mom will also text or call once a week, so I don't tend to be the one that reaches out.

I think I can work on that part of me. I think I could be a better me if I was a little bit more outgoing in that way. I don't usually feel guilty about it. If I'm needed, there will be a call for me. I feel like I'm available. But I also don't like to keep people in my pocket. I don't have friends that I call every day or that I even call weekly or monthly. But I just love people. And so when I'm with them, I really give them my undivided attention. And then when it's time for me to be alone, it's okay for me to just be alone and do my thing. When I'm invited somewhere, I usually say yes and come along, but I don't tend to be an inviter. I don't tend to be an initiator and in fact, I usually will go do things alone. There's just so many fewer negotiations when you do things on your own, like I can leave when I want.

I'm keen to just be my own negotiator, I guess.

### *"I'm keen to just be my own negotiator"*

Everybody's so different. There does need to be somebody who's the initiator. Every once in a while, I will initiate something because I have a longing and I have to fulfill that longing. But for the most part, what I noticed is that I am not the initiator; somebody has to probe me.

It's good that there are people that do that, because I could really get lost into nowhere if nobody was bothering to probe out for me. I need to keep those people around me. I do need to keep those people and be aware of who those people are and say, "hey, if you don't hear from me for a while you should check in."

I guess I like routine. And routines are really structured and I like structure to feel kind of pride at the end of the day that I really gave the most of myself to that day. Even in summer or weekends, I pretty much stay on a regimented scheduled routine. I get up usually at five and I go to bed really early, it's just really good for my mental health. I also need to take super huge long walks. There was a time in my life where I was more interested in running, not so much anymore, but I walk. I walk, I mean, I'm telling you, I walk on a weekend and walk for 20,000 steps which is like 10 miles. It's just because of just the nature of how my brain is working to think; that's my thinking time. That's where I'm visualizing and planning and reflecting.

*Could you expand more on how you keep yourself occupied?*

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I probably spend a good hour and a half every day walking. And that's really important for me and when I don't do that, I feel a little cuckoo.

My house has two detached little houses. It sounds like a mansion, it's not; it's really small, but the house is like my clean studio. The garage is like my dirty studio. And then the other building is sort of like a finished gallery space. I have an internal motivation to figure out what is nagging at my attention first, and then I'll just start plugging into that. Usually, I have a deadline. I work with an artist community called Pivot. Pivot is a wearable sculpture and fashion tribe. So, there are designers who make clothing to actually sell which are really conventional, beautiful, wonderful kinds of clothing. And then there's artists like me, who play with the idea of what is wearable, what maybe shouldn't be worn as an artistic expression.

This tribe that I work with, they usually put on a yearly show. I always have a kind of goal in mind to finish one major work each year for their show. The, I've got another one in the builds that sits on the back burner and needs me to kind of push it forward. So, I do a lot of push and pulling, I don't stay on just like one project till it's finished. I've usually got a lot of things happening simultaneously.

Artwork is kind of always in the state of rotation. I like to be able to see finished things so that rotation is really important for me. If everything's just making progress all the time it can be really frustrating for me mentally. I don't like, 'oh, four hours now. What can I do in four hours?' It's just like, what's calling to me? And then I go to it and then I work on it. I guess that routine of just consistently progressing art pieces forward and consistently having a kind of deliverable or an outcome, keeps me motivated, keeps me kind of centered, and it keeps me pushing forward.

With school, oftentimes, I'll start something with a demo. Then just with the nature of teaching, I don't usually have time to sit down and finish it. So suddenly, I have a different kind of time. I wouldn't say that I have more time now. I would say actually, I have more grading to do now because of the way that I have to grade things. But I also feel a need in that quiet time to be creating.

So instead of reaching out to people and just hanging out and talking, I'm just focused on getting more work done.



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*Anything you'd like to expand on?*

I don't think it's a good thing to feel isolated. I don't like the feeling of isolation. And what I started to say at the beginning of this is that I actually feel like the virus. I feel like I'm the plague, just because I am so isolated. It would be nice to have maybe like a little bubble group.

But not at the expense of giving up all the stuff that I like to do. So, I don't know, maybe it's healthy for me at this point to realize that I need to start like an artists group where I have artist friends, and I used to do this, who would come over on a regular basis and just be creating art together so that it's not always an alone experience. It can be like quilting bees, like we're all the ladies that would get together like that; that would feel really good to me, I think I would enjoy that very much. But, I don't want to go to a bar and just hang out so if that's the way that the tribe has to go, I don't want to go there. I'd rather just stay and create than to sit and do that. It doesn't provide for me in a way that I need. There was a time in my life where I could do that, but actually never could do exactly that, but dancing.

Isolation is a tricky subject. And certainly, I create probably because I like to be alone, but I don't like to feel alone and creating allows me to feel less alone.



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# PROFESSIONAL ARTICLE

RACHEL NEEDHAM

Isolation is an interesting concept. It relates to connection and its antithesis, disconnection, and yet isolation imparts a special emphasis on context. The where and when, if you will. I can make the confident assumption about where you've been lately: home. And you've been there for roughly: 8 months and counting. The current coronavirus pandemic is to blame, making the current efforts in isolating uniquely a matter of ethics—that is, if you love your granny, remain masked and at least 6 feet away from her. So, like the lone cowboy of yesterday, headed west with visions of settlement grandeur, we're beholden to no one...free in a sense.

Ever seen one of those old spaghetti westerns? There's a reason that the lone cowboy ends up talking to his horse at some point in the film. Cowboys weren't meant to be solitary. And neither are you. Your brain, like all mammalian brains, is wired to instinctually explore, engage others and even play, but only in contexts of safety and other conditions that don't elicit survival instincts, like danger and hunger. You don't even have to think about connecting. It's not a cerebral process necessarily. In other words: it happens naturally given an optimal environment.

The student submissions eloquently articulate this very notion: we need others but we also need safety, despite context. It doesn't matter if we're at home or at school. It doesn't matter if we're alone or in a crowd. We're constantly balancing a seesaw-of-polarities: connection and safety. And while Brene Brown will tell you to be brave, I'm going to urge you to first accept whatever you observe as your knee-jerk reaction to this covid lockdown.

Some of us over-rationalize; these folks typically lecture and preach. Some of us hold tightly to people or things. Others let go too easily. Some of us get mad or extra funny or just plain confused, understandably given the uncertainty of what's to come. And others, many of whom have struggled with mental health challenges prior to Covid-19, may find that it's harder now than ever. It's all worthy of compassion, so please give some to yourself.

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What comes next is fairly simple too: know that, while your situation is always unique to you, you are not alone. As you consider how best to take good care of yourself, know that help is at the ready. I've provided resources for you and your parents alike below. As a special note to those of Aletheia's readers that are managing mental health issues, it's especially important that you make use of the youth crisis and teen-to-teen support lines as needed. After all, research validates that Covid-19 presents unique challenges to you, relative to prior generations, and, for many of you, accepting help is an act of resistance to isolation and a choice that Sartre suggested is one of few true exercises of freedom in life. Furthermore, as a therapist, I'd like to add that accepting help is a healthy way of being in relationship with yourself—something Covid-19 can never take away.

Finally, thank you for the honor of participating in this month's installment of Aletheia. Please accept my deepest gratitude for the experience of reading your submissions and working with the Aletheia staff—you are all an inspiration to me.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Needham holds dual licensure as both a Marriage and Family Therapist and a Professional Clinical Counselor, working with teens, adults, families and couples in therapy at Family Therapy Center of Silicon Valley. Rachel integrates research-validated, attachment and neuropsychology-informed treatment with other effective modalities, including mindfulness, cognitive behavioral, and family systems therapies.

She holds a master's degree in Counseling Psychology from John F. Kennedy University (JFKU), and served as adjunct faculty within JFKU's Undergraduate Psychology Program postgraduation. Outside of her work, Rachel likes to do volunteer work with rescue horses.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

1. California Youth Crisis Line: Youth ages 12-24 can call or text 800-843-5200 or chat online for 24/7 crisis support.
2. TEEN LINE: Teens can talk to another teen by texting "TEEN" to 839863 from 6pm – 9pm, or call 800-852-8336 from 6pm – 10pm.
3. Trevor Project: Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678 for 24/7 information and suicide prevention resources for LGBTQ youth.
4. Get connected: <https://www.covidnetworks.org> and <https://www.sjpl.org/teens>
5. Get moving with others: <https://www.rei.com/events/search>
6. Mindfulness for Loneliness: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/loneliness>
7. Parent support: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/08/supporting-teenagerspandemic>
8. Group therapy: <https://www.teentherapycentersv.com/group-therapy>