

Editorial: Be there to help teens, seniors cope with stay-at-home pressures



An e-learning extra credit assignment to send email letters and artwork to residents of the Moorings of Arlington Heights senior living community. included this artwork by Maine West High School senior Dylan Van Fleet. (*Courtesy of Dylan Van Fleet*)

The Daily Herald Editorial Board

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It's been 26 days since Gov. J.B. Pritzker told Illinois residents to stay at home to blunt the spread of the COVID-19 virus and by now, you're likely feeling a touch of cabin fever.

The truth is you're not alone in itching to get out and interact with people. Most of us are doing our best to follow social distancing, work at home and avoid contact for a reason, while trying to make the best of a bad situation. There's no choice.

But the situation extends beyond a boring inconvenience to many suburban residents, including teenagers who rely so heavily on interacting with the friends who form their social safety net and older folks whose loneliness is worsened by an order that further limits their contact with others. For those groups, 26 days confined to home may create extreme anxiety and mental health issues.

What can we do? Family, friends and others can talk, listen and let them know someone is there for them, that they are not alone and there are resources to ease the pain.

Experts say the stay-at-home order can build a strange sense of loneliness for teens that is worsened by uncertainty over whether they can experience rites of passage they value, such as prom and graduation, and seeing the concern shown by adults.

Social media can help, but so too can using the time to learn a new skill or catch up on sleep.

"There are some good things I think that can come out of this," Allison Pustelnik, a senior at Downers Grove North High School and a member of Erika's Lighthouse (<https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/>) Teen Empowerment Club, told our Marie Wilson.

Erika's Lighthouse has created a Web page for teens and their families called "We're in this Together" (<https://secure.qgiv.com/event/inthistogether/>) that gathers resources including apps, videos, quizzes and games about positive mental health, a depression toolbox, ways to stay connected, e-learning resources, a

parent handbook, tips to start conversations and healthy family activities, all in an effort to support emotional stability.

Older residents need family, friends, neighbors and others to check in and make sure they're healthy but also so they can interact. Maybe that's a phone call, or a conversation through a glass door or an open window.

An extra credit project by some Maine West High School math students to write letters to residents of the Moorings of Arlington Heights senior living community shows how we can help those in need.

Sixty students in Amy Claus' e-learning classes wrote email letters about themselves, the subjects they like and the activities they do. Some attached artwork. Moorings officials said there were tears and smiles and the seniors and staff loved the letters.

"It was just really beautiful to see," said social worker Kara Atwood. "It made our entire day."

We all have the power to make someone's day.

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