



Ways to Support your Student Returning to Campus

TU is going to great lengths to ensure our students will be safe when returning to campus during the threat of COVID-19. Some of the social distancing measures in place will require students who would have previously lived with roommates to live alone. Face-to-face gatherings will also look different. While we plan to take many different steps to keep students connected with community and engaged with their peers, we want to be proactive in helping prevent students from feeling isolated. Here is some basic information and ways you can help support your student so they have a great experience in the fall. We believe the best measure of prevention is preparation.

Solitude, Isolation, and Loneliness

Solitude, isolation, and loneliness are similar terms, but they have distinct meanings.

- Solitude is the state of being alone.
- Isolation is a lack of social relationships or emotional support.
- Loneliness is a craving for social contact. It is often linked to feelings of sadness and emptiness.

Spending time alone is not inherently bad. Solitude can be a healthy, rejuvenating experience. It can allow people to reconnect with their needs, goals, and feelings.

Some people require more solitude than others. Introverts, for example, enjoy spending lots of time alone and can feel drained through social interaction. Meanwhile, extroverts often need more social interaction to feel fulfilled. Circumstances that feel isolating or lonely to one person may be healthy for another.

What Is Social Isolation?

Social isolation is an absence of social relationships. It is distinct from solitude, which is simply the state of being alone. Social isolation can occur in solitude or in the vicinity of others.

Solitude can be chosen or forced, healthy or unhealthy. Social isolation describes an unwanted and often harmful experience. A person may be experiencing social isolation if they:

- Avoid social interaction due to shame or depression.
- Spend extended periods of time alone.
- Experience social anxiety or fears of abandonment at the idea of social interaction.
- Have only limited or superficial social contact.
- Lack important social or professional relationships.
- Develop severe distress and loneliness.

Things You Can Do to Help

Have a discussion with your student about things to do if they start feeling lonely, isolated, or depressed when they return to campus.

Help your student complete the Mental Well-being Plan so they can be prepared to manage these feelings if they occur.

Help them identify items of comfort or entertainment they can bring with them to campus.

Learn how to chat virtually on Zoom, Skype or FaceTime and create regular times you can virtually see each other.

Know the warning signs and pay attention to your student.

If you are concerned about your student or another student, complete a Canecares report so that our outreach team can contact them with resources and support:

<https://utulsa.edu/student-affairs/canecares/>

Encourage them to get involved in the activities the school is creating or join a student organization.

If you hear your student speaking self-critically about feeling lonely, encourage them that these feelings are valid and normal.

Encourage realistic expectations.

Explore TU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) self-help toolkit so you are familiar with the online resources available:

<https://utulsa.edu/counseling-services/services/>

Encourage them to reach out for support if they are struggling.

- TU CAPS information: 918-631-2200 or cpssc@utulsa.edu
- TU CAPS can also help your student connect with community mental health resources.