



COVID-19 Vinalhaven Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

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UNDERSTANDING ISOLATION

Imagine being Jessica Meir or Chris Cassidy, the two Maine astronauts who were on the space station at the same time. There you are, with four other people for months. You can talk with your family in a Zoom-like chat, but you can't touch them. You have work to do, but you don't go into the office or leave your very small living space. You don't see anyone other than your five co-astronauts. You start your rotation with a high degree of excitement and energy—after all, this is something you want to do, you are one the elite few that have been chosen, and you have been highly trained to know what to expect.

After a while, though, does that initial excitement wear off? Studies in isolation of astronauts and Antarctic researchers show that it does. In an article by Betsy Morris printed in the Wall Street Journal, Ms. Morris summarized the research and compared it to the social isolation in which we are living.

After some time, the astronauts and polar scientists may experience a period of **lethargy**, during which **spirits and energy dip**, and **productivity is greatly diminished**. Following that period, relationships can begin to fray, and small things become major irritants. As soon as the return to home date is known, though, spirits lift and energy returns.

We are not astronauts. We did not choose to do this, and we were not specially chosen for the roles we are playing. We received no training to prepare us for this. And we do not have a “return to home” date. **How do we manage to stay resilient?**

Let everything happen to you
Beauty and terror
Just keep going
No feeling is final
—Rainer Maria Rilke

One way is to appreciate that we share this problem with all of mankind, and **we are all in it together**. On Vinalhaven, we are part of a smaller, caring community. When asked what she missed the most while at the space station, Jessica Meir did not hesitate to mention nature—the ability to take a breath of fresh air with all the sensations that accompany it. We, on this beautiful island, can feel our place in the world, our community, and take in as much of that air as we like.

None of us have prepared for this. We need to accept that there are real consequences for this isolation. **Recognizing that there are good reasons why we may be lethargic or impatient with others, may help us deal with our negative feelings.**

If you are having trouble finding your way in this difficult time, there are many different kinds of resources available to help you. They are fully listed on the Town's webpage **Help with Worry, Stress and Anxiety**.
townofvinalhaven.org/home/pages/help-worry-stress-and-anxiety-0