

“Social Distancing” vs “Physical Distancing”



“Social distancing” has become the term for how experts describe what we need to do to fight against the spread of COVID-19. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the term does not emphasize the community social connectedness needed to manage the outbreak. **The term does little to shape social dynamics that boost the public’s resilience to sustain required behavior change over the long term.**

Social distancing – is to refrain from activities that either lead to physical proximity with others. These guidelines don't ask individuals to isolate themselves socially. They are not calling for discontinuing, terminating, or abbreviating how we connect with others – our friends, families, those in and out of our social networks. Nor do they have anything to do with how we can come together in this age of social media and technology. The term lumps all categories of social activities together. It implies not only physical but also non-physical distance. Using the term reinforces the idea that these directives encourage both physical and social separation.

Why This Matters? There is the tendency for people to resist problems when they are opposed to the solution. *The prescribed physical distance requires people to make difficult adjustments to their daily lives. As a result, some people who perceive no direct personal threat from the disease may be ignoring, minimizing, or even defying these directives.*

Calls for social distancing have paid little attention to the need to support social connection. In the rush to achieve physical separation, there has been almost no effort to encourage increasing participation in social activities that maintain physical separation.

What social connections do for society:

- Feeling socially connected can help people reach out to others in their communities and support each other as well as to volunteer and take pride in their communities.
- Social connection promotes resilient communities that proactively adapt to change and are better able to withstand and respond to threats, stresses and other disturbances like noncompliance with government-issued guidelines.

So, changing our mindset during this pandemic from “social distancing” to “physical distancing with social connection,” will help our communities in many ways. By maintaining connections, we’ll increase resiliency and endurance, get buy-in from the public, and adapt and change however we can as a community to make it through the end of this pandemic.

Are you having issues with social isolation during COVID-19. EAP counselors can help. EAP counseling is confidential and FREE! Call the COVID Counseling helpline 800-801-4182, or 402-354-8000 or email eap@bestcareeap.org to schedule an appointment.