

Even before the current COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 40% of adults in the U.S. reported feeling lonely some or all of the time. Loneliness and social isolation can have a range of negative effects, including worsening symptoms of depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses ([source](#)). Creative activities can help by increasing meaningful social connection with others, reducing stress, and helping people to understand and process their emotions ([source](#)).

## 1 Reading can improve mental health and wellbeing

- Both fiction and nonfiction writing about mental illness can validate readers' experiences with mental health challenges, reduce stigma, and develop resiliency ([source](#)). Some studies have shown that fiction is particularly beneficial for increasing readers' empathy and strengthening social skills - which can improve relationships, important sources of emotional support and wellbeing ([source](#)).
- Take Action: Check out [Spaces to Thrive's reading list](#) for recommended books and watch "[Reflections on Mental Health and Writing](#)," a ThriveNYC Virtual Conversation with authors who have written about mental health and mental illness.

## 2 Music can help you relax and improve your mood

- A 2013 study found that listening to music can actually reduce an individual's stress response when experiencing a distressing situation or a crisis ([source](#)).
- Take Action: Register for a virtual [Concert in Motion](#) or [download a relaxing playlist](#).

## 3 Visual storytelling about mental health and mental illness - whether in film or the visual arts - can help you feel less alone

- People experiencing or recovering from a mental health challenge can find solace and inspiration in storytelling ([source](#)). Stories about mental health recovery are especially important for people who are socially isolated or lack a consistent social support network ([source](#)).
- Take Action: Watch a film from the [Unlonely Film Festival](#). For each film, this site includes discussion questions and activities to help you explore the themes more deeply.

## 4

### Writing and journaling can foster positive emotions like gratitude and build resilience

- Journaling about things you are grateful for has been linked to improved mental wellbeing ([source](#)). In a study following the September 11th attacks in New York City, researchers found that accessing positive emotions, like gratitude, after a crisis protected people from developing symptoms of depression ([source](#)).
- Take Action: If you don't have your own journaling routine, you can easily start with guidance from the [Foundation for Art and Healing](#).

## 5

### Making art can reduce anxiety and feelings of loneliness

- In one study, painting played a significant role in lessening loneliness among adolescents ([source](#)). In another, making art improved wellbeing for older adults ([source](#)).
- Take Action: [Start a virtual creativity challenge](#) with your community to stay connected, even while physically distant.