

OEI Podcast Episode #2
(Hosts: Alle and Betsy)

Alle

Hello and welcome to “Have you Heard” a listening project. On this podcast we’re going to share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. I’m Alle and I’m here today with Betsy.

Betsy (0:15) Hi

Alle (0:16)

Hi Betsy and in this episode we’re going to cover the topic of social isolation and how to avoid it during the pandemic mm, It’s a good one (Betsy mhm). Make sure you stay until the end of the episode to learn more about some great resources that can help you avoid isolation and stay healthy. So Betsy we all know that the safest way to stay healthy is to stay away from others who could potentially infect us. For some people it means that you’re stuck within in the walls of your home either completely by yourself or if you live alone, to remember that roughly 25% of the population in the U.S. lives alone. Or if you’re stuck with the same person or the same people day in and day out with very little distraction it can be very difficult.

Betsy (1:02)

Yes, it certainly is and yes I’m insolation with my husband of 49 years. We make a good team we are actually good campers but every once in a while I think, are you still here? Don’t you, don’t you have anywhere to go? You know stuff like that, that’s called a marriage but you know it is what it is.

Alle (1:22)

No, I I definitely understand and I’m on a different end of the spectrum over here, I’ve got a one and half year old toddler that is here with me and has been every day since March which I absolutely love of course but it’s a little mind boggling at times that’s for sure.

Betsy (1:38)

Yeah, I remember that too - not social distancing but having a little one around all the time.

Alle (1:45)

Well, I don't know. Let's talk about what happens if you become isolated. So, I actually read one study that said that the lack of social connections is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Betsy...wow) or even having a drinking disorder, is in that crazy? (Betsy, mmm). The study also found that loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity so it puts you at a higher risk for heart disease, stroke and dementia just to name a few (Betsy uhh). So I think it's really important to ask this question, how do you know if you're isolated? Right? How do you know? The AARP gives a list of signs to lookout for and they even actually have a test that you can take on their website which I think it's fantastic. Some of those items on their list they include these: Deep boredom. So, deep boredom like a general lack of interest in things and withdrawing from others, losing interest in personal hygiene, poor eating and nutrition.

Betsy (2:45)

Yeah and also clutter environment, low energy and lack of motivation makes one feel worthless or hopeless. Yeah, you know.

Alle (2:55)

Yeah that's pretty serious.

Betsy (2:56)

Yeah, it' is.

Alle (2:57)

Gosh, I think, what can we do to avoid isolation? I think it's really important to share our stories Betsy and our personal experience that we've had with others that have experienced isolation or ourselves. So I'm going to go ahead and share my story. It's more about my personal experience dealing with others in isolation. But back in 2012 I knew that I loved working with the senior hearing loss and the deaf population. But I really wanted to further my experience which I actually did. And I devoted my time working with the Alzheimer's community so both patients

and their spouses. And what I did was I facilitated support groups for both the patients and the Alzheimer's spouses and their caretakers/partners which actually enabled my understanding of the importance of eliminating isolation and a world that can become so insular either through suffering with a hearing loss or through a painful disease like Alzheimer's. What I did was I focused so much of my time on helping both the patient and the partner to eliminate isolation as much as possible when it was possible and also to be aware of its negative impacts because there's so many. Isolation can easily occur when a person would rather hide from their experience and not share it or their life with the outside world any longer just because it seems easier to do that. I remember specifically one couple, oh I loved them this one couple. Mmm, they were very young, they were in the mid 60's and the wife had been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's which is just devastating. And just how unbelievably frighten she was of her whole community and her previous outside support system finding out, she didn't want anyone to know. So she committed to staying at home in which really she slowly she started to lose her perspective of independence it was really really devastating. She relied on her husband for all entertainment and support value which was completely weigh in on him. And her disease progressed in ways that we were all shocked by. So I would see her probably every two weeks and her cognitive ability declined due to inactivity but her body also physically declined due to inactivity. And her previous ability to communicate really declined because she was no longer interacting with the outside world. My main point is this, we need to make sure that isolation is not a resuming factor in this pandemic if and when possible. People need to go outside, go for a walk, make their own phone calls if possible. Interact at the very least with people over the phone or online and learn how to do so if they can do themselves already by themselves. Families need to check in on their loved ones and insure that our elder population is not falling into a despair of isolation because it can really enhance any sort of hearing loss that is already present or any sort of disease that's already present.

Betsy (5:51)

Wow, that is such a great story (Alle...ahh thanks) and actually it is very real, I mean it really is much more dangerous than you think (Alle...right) been isolated not having connections with people or feeling loved or whatever. So as for me,

which is a little different than what you're talking about but sort of the same. I needed to feel productive, you know? With a project or something (Alle... mmhmm) to distract me from saneness of waiting out the pandemic. So I discovered old photos and I actually, from over the years, and decided to finally create albums for them. And that did consume my time as there were many photos, but what was cool about it is that I was reliving some of those stories and memories that these pictures reminded me of. (Alle...wow). The telephone becomes even more important as ever now that everyone is social distancing. And if you have hearing loss and dislike talking on the phone now is the time to explore options, like an amplified phone or a CapTel caption phone. So I wanted to call some of those people in the photographs, touch base again. Now I could send an email, sure but I didn't remember some of the addresses and I wanted to hear their voices. Plus to be honest, a computer and I don't always get along very well (Alle...hahaha) technically speaking you know (Alle...yes I do). But I also decided to learn something new and I learned how to zoom (Alle...oh wow!) I can zoom! Wonderful zoom where I can see everyone's faces and hear their voices and swap stories and catch up. Now I want you to know that I have several friends who struggle with hearing loss, myself included. Especially in group setting where I find myself feeling left out often because I can't hear those who speak softly or have strong accents, but you see there are captioning solutions for that now. Well, video conferencing or social zooming, and now on the CapTel caption phones slowly can read or not quite hearing anymore, oh it helps I can't tell you how much it really helps

Alle (7:56)

Yeah I'm really glad that you brought that up because there are so many resources to help when you just can't hear through technology these days, you know what I mean? These are great resources. (Betsy...yeah.) You know so, gosh, how do we combat isolation then? It seems like it's something that's just kind of present. Well, we can connect and reconnect with family or friends over the phone, through email, or through video conferences, through written letters etc. And I have to say I've been sending out a lot of written letters these days to people that I think really get excited when they receive them. And I love writing them. I actually get really (Betsy...yeah) excited when I put them in the mailbox. (Betsy...I

love it!) So it's really it's yeah really fun for me to do that and know that they are going to expect a letter. So don't be afraid to initiate contact, in fact plan it. I think it's really important to know you are not bothering someone, just to plan that contact. It gets easy to get stuck in a routine of watching TV all day long and living from meal to meal, right?

Betsy (8:54)

Yeah yeah when someone just pops up in my mind and I follow up on this inkling to call them, I'm blown away by their gratitude that I reached out. (Alle...aww). They were usually all alone and they would just say things like "I was just thinking about you" or "you couldn't have called at a better time, thank you."

Alle (9:12)

That's so sweet, doesn't that make you feel good? (Betsy...absolutely wonderful). Right so don't worry about bothering people again you guys. Don't worry and don't feel guilty about reaching out. People do appreciate it just like you would. How awesome is it to know that someone's been thinking of you and then took the time to actually make that phone call. So go outside and get some fresh air (Betsy...oh yes indeed it feeds the soul). Mhhmm, reconnecting with nature is good for mental and emotional health. I know that I personally have to get outside at least once a day. I have to (Betsy...me too). So learn how to do new things like Betsy was mentioning. You have the time so make use of it.

Betsy (9:53)

Yeah like on your computer, learn to zoom! Or my favorite, a new hobby, memorizing lyrics to show tunes you always loved. I heard, I read actually that that's really good exercise for the brain. Or the smartphone you know, simple stuff like taking pictures of those old photos and then sharing them in a text like our kids do, you know?

Alle (10:15)

Oh I love that I do that with my own grandparents actually. So yeah, there's all sorts of resources out there that can help people. There's this really cool program actually that I want to tell you about where you can request a pen pal and there's also chat rooms for seniors. But one that I've heard about is worldwide so you get to meet people from all different countries (Betsy...wow). I love that yes. So we'll

put all of these resources in writing for those who are interested. So the most important thing really is to remember that isolation is detrimental to both your physical and your emotional health. And that's why it's really vital that you find out what resources are in your area but also make sure you take advantage of them so that the pandemic doesn't prevent you from socializing safely. If you'd like a copy of these resources that we talked about on today's episode, please go ahead and visit our website which is oeius.org and click on contact. Again that's oeius.org and don't forget to join us next time as we cover the topic of "Someone that I care about needs hearing aids but doesn't realize it; how to start the conversation." that's a great one. I know we all know somebody like that, right? (Betsy...yup!). Haha so this is Alle and this is Betsy and we've had a great time so thank you guys so much and make sure you stay safe and stay connected. Bye! (Betsy...Bye!)