

Recommended Self-Care Practices During the COVID 19 Pandemic

- Stick to a routine as much as possible, you may be working from home, your kids are doing school at home, nothing seems the same. The more you can keep doing your regular routine (wake at the same time, eat at the same time, exercise at the same time etc.) the more it will restore some sense of normalcy to the otherwise abnormal situation we are all in.
- Create opportunities to be physically distant, but socially connected. Call, Skype or Facetime with friends and family. Have family movie nights or family game nights. Help your children with their homework. Reach out to loved ones, especially those who live alone or in communities that have been hardest hit.
- Practice Mindfulness and other relaxation techniques. Clinicians have known for years that mindfulness activities can be helpful for dealing with anxiety. Your therapist can teach you how to do mindful breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, full body stretches and other techniques to help you relax.
- Catch up and slow down. Take time for activities you enjoy. Clean that junk drawer, get the clothes ready to be donated, catch up on that scrap book, play with your dog, listen to a podcast, read a good book, take a bubble bath, watch that documentary. Keeping your mind active is critical to not allow negative self-talk to creep into the empty spaces.
- Maintain a healthy sleep schedule, eat healthy and exercise. Take a walk and go outside for sunshine and fresh air. Just make sure to stay 6 feet from your neighbors and obey restrictions on larger gatherings.
- Practice patience with family members. Most people are doing the best they can, their best may look different than yours, but it is still their best. When the whole family is staying at home you may notice yourself getting more irritated with one another. Children may return to behaviors they have outgrown (toilet accidents, bedwetting, tantrums), teenagers may become sullen and withdrawn and want to just stay in their rooms, spouses may bark orders instead of asking nicely. Sometimes this is a signal of anxiety, depression or fear. Try and open up lines of communication and acknowledge that this is hard for everyone. Express expectations and consequences, but resist the urge to yell and exert unnecessary control.
- Get involved. Find out how you can help your community during this time. See if healthy volunteers are needed at the hospitals, shelters, food banks etc. Put hearts in your window and join the “All in this together” movement. Write letters of thanks to doctors, nurses and other first responders across the country.
- Practice positive and affirming self-talk such as; “I can do this”, “I’m doing the best I can”, “I can’t control other people, only my reaction to them”, “I am capable and strong enough to get through this”, and “I am not alone”.

Recommended Self-Care Practices During the COVID 19 Pandemic Continued:

- Avoid self-medicating. Be careful that you are not using alcohol, food, amazon or certain internet sites to help regulate your mood.
- Take a “media break” if you start to feel overwhelmed or panicked. It is important to consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19, especially for children. Spending too much time reading or listening to information can lead to unnecessary fear and anxiety. Stay up to date on what is important to foster preventative and safeguarding measures so you can do your part to slow the spread of the disease, but hours of news consumption on this, or any topic, is not good for your mental health.
- If you are a person of faith, stay connected to your faith community and your spiritual and religious practices. Can't gather at a Church, Synagogue, Temple or Mosque? Join on line services or worship privately.
- Focus on what you can control. So many things right now are outside of our control. Accept this and shift your focus to those things you can control, such as your Mindset. Practice gratitude. Try find something to be thankful for every day.
- Remain calm and reassuring to your children. Provide honest and accurate information, but keep in mind their age and maturity. Check in with them and find out what they are thinking and what they have heard. Let them know to come to you with questions. Teach them good preventative measures and focus on how they can help keep safe. As Mr. Rogers says, teach them to “Look for the helpers...you will always find people who are helping.” This wise advice helps divert children to focus on safety instead of distress.

More resources for Mental Health and COVID-19: Here are some good resources regarding how to talk to your children about COVID-19, the mental health aspect of COVID-19, and how to deal with the social distancing that accompanies it

- American Psychological Association:
<https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress: <https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- CDC: How to talk to children about the Coronavirus
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>