



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS TO EVERYONE

MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS

25 TIPS FOR COVID-19

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Mental Health Wellness: 25 Tips for COVID-19 © 2020 by MYND Initiative Inc.
#breakthestigma #mentalhealthmatters

1. Stick to a routine. Go to sleep and wake up at a reasonable time, write a schedule that is varied and includes time for work as well as self-care.



2. Dress for the social life you want, not the social life you have. Get showered and dressed in comfortable clothes, wash your face, brush your teeth. Take the time to have a bath or facial. Put on some bright colours. It is amazing how our dress can impact our mood.



3. Get out at least once a day, for at least thirty minutes. If you are concerned about contact with others, go out first thing in the morning, or later in the evening, and try less travelled streets and avenues. If you are at high risk or living with those who are at high risk, open the windows and blast the fan. It is amazing how much fresh air can do for spirits.

4. Find some time to move each day, again daily for at least thirty minutes. If you don't feel comfortable going outside, there are many YouTube videos that offer free movement classes, and if all else fails, turn on the music and have a dance party!



5. Reach out to others, you guessed it, at least once daily for thirty minutes. Try to do FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, texting—connect with other people to seek and provide support. Don't forget to do this for your children as well. Set up virtual playdates with friends daily via FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Kids, Zoom, etc—your kids miss their friends, too!



6. Stay hydrated and eat well. This one may seem obvious, but stress and eating often don't mix well, and we can find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat some good and nutritious foods, and challenge yourself to learn how to cook something new!

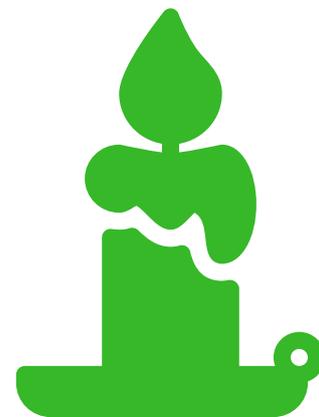
7. Develop a self-care toolkit. This can look different for everyone. A lot of successful self-care strategies involve a sensory component, using one or more of the seven senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (comforting pressure). An idea for each: a soft blanket or stuffed animal, a hot chocolate, photos of vacations, comforting music, lavender or eucalyptus oil, a small swing or rocking chair or a weighted blanket. Keeping a journal, reading an inspirational book, or colouring a mandala colouring book is wonderful, whilst bubbles to blow or blowing watercolour on paper through a straw is visually appealing and helps to control breathing. Mint gum, Listerine strips, ginger ale, frozen Starburst, ice packs, and cold are also good for anxiety regulation. For children, it is great to help them create a self-regulation comfort box (often a shoe-box or bin they can decorate and then fill with comforting items) ready to use as first-aid when overwhelmed.

8. Spend extra time playing with children. Children will rarely communicate how they are feeling, but will often make a bid for attention and communication through play. Don't be surprised to see therapeutic themes of illness, doctor visits, and isolation play through. Understand that play is cathartic and helpful for children—it is how they process their world and problem solve, and there's a lot they are seeing and experiencing in the here and now.



9. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and a wide berth. A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace through blowups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges or continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.

10. Everyone needs their own retreat space. Space is at a premium, particularly with city living. It is important that people think through their own separate space for work and for relaxation. For children, and others who struggle mentally and emotionally, helping them identify a place they can retreat to when stressed can be helpful. You can make this place cozy by using blankets, pillows, cushions, scarves, beanbags, tents, and “forts”. It is good to know that even when we are on top of each other, we have our own special place to go to be alone.



11. Expect behavioural issues, and respond gently. We are all struggling with disruption in routine, particularly those who rely on routines constructed by others to make them feel safe and to know what comes next. Expect increased anxiety, worries and fears, nightmares, difficulty separating or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Do not introduce major behavioural plans or consequences at this time—hold stable and focus on emotional connection.

12. Focus on safety and attachment. We are going to be living for a bit with the unprecedented demand for meeting all work deadlines, homeschooling children, running a sterile household, and making a whole lot of entertainment in confinement. We can get wrapped up in meeting expectations in all domains, but we must remember that these are scary and unpredictable times. For children, it is important to focus on strengthening connections by allowing them to take the lead in their play and activities, through physical touch, through reading therapeutic books, and via verbal reassurances that you will be there for them in this time.

13. Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance. This idea is connected with #12. We are doing too many things at this moment, under fear and stress. This does not make a formula for excellence. Instead, give yourself what psychologists call “radical self-acceptance”: accepting everything about yourself, your current situation, and your life without question, blame, or pushback. You cannot fail at this—there is no road map, no precedent for this, and we are all truly doing the best we can in an impossible situation.



14. Limit social media and COVID conversation, especially around children.

One can find tons of information on COVID-19 to consume, and it changes minute to minute. The information is often sensationalized, negatively skewed, and alarmist. Find a few trusted sources that you can check in with consistently, limit it to a few times a day, and set a time limit for yourself on how much you consume (again 30 minutes tops, 2-3 times daily). Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot from children and others who may be sensitive or unable to cope well with bad news—some of us see and hear everything, and can become very frightened by what we hear.

15. Notice the good in the world, the helpers. There is a lot of scary, negative, and overwhelming information to take in regarding this pandemic. However, there are also stories of people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. It is important to counterbalance the heavy information with hopeful information.



16. Help others. Find ways, big and small, to give back to others. Support restaurants, offer to do grocery shopping, check-in with elderly neighbours, write psychological wellness tips for others—helping others gives us a sense of agency when things seem out of control.

17. Find something you can control, and control the heck out of it. In moments of big uncertainty that can seem overwhelming, control your little corner of the world. Organise your bookshelf, purge your closet, put together that furniture, group your toys. It helps to anchor and ground us when the bigger things are chaotic.



18. Find a long-term project to dive into. Now is the time to learn how to play the keyboard, put together a huge jigsaw puzzle, start a 15 hour game of Risk, paint a picture, read the Harry Potter series, binge watch an 8 season show, crochet a blanket, solve a Rubix cube, or develop a new town in Animal Crossing. Find something that will keep you busy, distracted, and engaged to take breaks from what is going on in the outside world.

19. Engage in repetitive movements and left-right movements. Research has shown that repetitive movement (knitting, colouring, painting, clay sculpting, jump roping etc) especially left-right movement (running, drumming, skating, hopping) can be effective at self-soothing and maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress.



20. Find an expressive art and go for it. Our emotional brain is very receptive to the creative arts, and it is a direct portal for the release of feelings. Find something that is creative (sculpting, drawing, dancing, music, singing, playing) and give it your all. See how relieved you can feel. It is a very effective way of helping anyone to emote and communicate as well!

21. Find lightness and humour in each day. There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day.



22. Reach out for help—your team is there for you. If you have a therapist or psychiatrist, they are available to you, even at a distance. Keep up your medications and your therapy sessions the best you can. If you are having difficulty coping, seek out help for the first time. There are mental health people on the ready to help you through this crisis. Your children's teachers and related service providers will do anything within their power to help, especially for those parents tasked with the difficult task of being the carer of their child with special challenges. Seek support groups of fellow home-schoolers, parents, neighbours, or other people in a similar situation to feel connected. There is help and support out there, any time of the day—although we are physically distant, we can always connect virtually.

23. “Chunk” your quarantine, take it moment by moment. We have no road map for this. We don’t know what this will look like in one day, one week, or one month from now. Often, when I work with patients who have anxiety around overwhelming issues, I suggest that they engage in a strategy called “chunking”—focusing on whatever bite-sized piece of a challenge that feels manageable. Whether that be 5 minutes, a day, or a week at a time—find what feels doable for you, and set a timestamp for how far ahead in the future you will let yourself worry. Take each “chunk” one at a time, and move through stress in pieces.

24. Remind yourself daily that this is temporary. It seems in the midst of this quarantine that it will never end. It is terrifying to think of the road stretching ahead of us. Please take time to remind yourself that although this is very scary and difficult and will go on for an undetermined amount of time, it is a season of life and it will pass. We will return to feeling free, safe, busy, and connected in the days ahead.

25. Find the lesson. This whole crisis can seem sad, senseless, and at times, avoidable. When psychologists work with trauma, a key feature to helping someone work through said trauma is to help them identify what they are capable of and the potential positive outcomes they can effect, the meaning and construction that can come out of destruction. What can each of us learn here, in big and small ways, from this crisis? What needs to change in ourselves, our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world?

