

Emotional Survival Guide for COVID-19

I thought I'd put together a guide to help myself, my clients, and others cope with the increasing fear, depression, stress, boredom, confusion, and isolation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a difficult time for many and stressors from work (or lack thereof), family, school, and the situation itself can overwhelm us, thereby depleting our immune systems and making us more susceptible to mental and/or physical illness. I urge you all to take a break from the stress, ask yourself **“What can I do for myself right now to make myself feel a little better? What do I need?”** and then do something to help yourself feel a bit more in control. After all, we cannot control the pandemic or much that is going on right now outside of our own homes. We can, however, control how we respond and how we feel moment to moment.

We have choices. Pay attention to yourself and what you need and **make intentional and mindful choices** throughout your day to break up the worry or stress, boredom or isolation.

Go through this list of options, add to it your own ideas, circle ones that you might want to do or that could work for you, and then put them on your schedule or set a reminder on your phone to try them out! Last night, I sat down with this list with my husband and we went through all of the things that could work for our family to relieve some of the frustration, and we worked some into the day today. I truly believe that today was a much better day as a result.

The list is organized in two columns. The left side of the page includes items for lower levels of emotion, the day-to-day stress, aggravation, sadness, loneliness, anxiety, etc. Adding some of these activities into your day can help prevent these feelings from becoming overwhelming. If they do become overwhelming however, the column on the right has ideas for those “red zone” moments when we really need to try to calm down but don't know how.

The last pages include online resources that I have seen over the past few days. There are a million more that I didn't list. Religious organizations are hosting free prayer sessions that you can join virtually, gyms are doing classes online, charities have creative ways to engage with others, and therapists and healers are offering free workshops and support groups through telehealth... there are many things available if you look for them. **Spend time finding something that will help ground you and keep you calm.** It's far more productive in the long run than watching the never-ending stream of panic regarding the virus. If there's a hobby or activity that you enjoy, see if there is an online way to participate. Or, just go outside, take a breath, and **relax your body and your mind.**

Many of us went from highly structured, routine days to absolute mayhem! **Create a structure** (set an alarm in the morning rather than waking up WHENEVER) and organize your day with what you need to do and things you want to do. Then try to follow it as best as possible.

We will get through this together. Stay healthy and well. And for all of us that have said, “I don't have enough time,” maybe now you do. How are you going to spend it?

Thinking of you all,
Dr. Joanna Fava
Psychologist

Strategies for Managing Emotions During this Period of Isolation and Stress

During Periods of Lower Emotions

During Periods of High Emotions

<p>Activities – Puzzles, Board Games, Coloring, Singing, Play an Instrument, Watch a Favorite Movie or TV Show, Play Video Games, Draw, Cook, Bake, Write in a Journal, Read, Listen to Music, Watch funny YouTube videos, Play cards, Look at pictures, Put on Makeup, Do yard work or Gardening, Go outside and listen (the wind, the birds, rustling of leaves, traffic, chatter, rain), Play with your pet, Knit/Crochet, Take Pictures, Work on the car, Fly a kite, Go for a drive, Write a Blog</p>	<p>Intense Exercise - run sprints up and down the block, run up and down the stairs, do pushups or jumping jacks, hold a plank for 60 secs, wall sits, lift weights</p>
<p>Contribute – help out a neighbor, call/text a friend and see how they are doing, reach out to someone you haven't spoken to in a while, help around the house, clean up, fix something, create a bag of donations of items you don't need anymore, make a card for someone, help someone with homework or schoolwork, take care of your pet (for example, walk or feed the dog), order takeout from your local restaurants that are struggling</p>	<p>Change your Body Temperature - Dip your whole face in COLD water for 10 secs, take a breath and dip for another 10 secs, breathe and repeat (for a minute)</p>
<p>Create a Different Emotion – Watch a funny show/video/movie; Listen to a comedian, Ask Alexa to tell you a joke; Listen to soothing music (if you're feeling anxious) or upbeat music (if you're feeling sad or down); Do something silly; Remember a funny thing that happened in the past in great detail; LAUGH OUT LOUD; Count your blessings</p>	<p>Paced Breathing – Inhale for a count of 5, Exhale for a count of 7 (hold your breath for the remainder of the count if you cant inhale or exhale for the full count). Do this for 5-10 minutes! It will be uncomfortable at first since your body isn't used to breathing so slowly. Keep going, through the discomfort until your body regulates and you feel calmer.</p>

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<p>Push Away the stress or an urge to react in a way that could make things work – Walk away from the stressful situation if possible, Go for a hike, Put the stress in an imaginary box and put it on an imaginary shelf (you have control of your mind. You Don't actually have to act on emotions or urges). Make a choice to delay acting on impulses for an hour and do something else to pass the time. Hopefully in that hour, the urge will subside.</p>	<p>Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Tense and release your muscles one at a time starting from your toes and working up to your face. Hold the tension for 5 seconds, squeezing tightly, then release slowly and fully. Exhale and move to next muscle group. There are lots of youtube videos to guide you in this as well.</p>
<p>Think of something else – Read something interesting or a thriller that you can't put down; Do Crossword Puzzles, Sudoku, or Challenging Riddles; Count backwards from 100 by 3s, Do the alphabet backwards (then try to do it faster and faster without messing up); Name all 50 States; Name all (pick any category: for example, NFL Teams, Songs by a particular artist, colors, countries in Europe, words that start with the letter "G", etc); work on something you want to accomplish</p>	<p>Create a different intense sensation – Hold ice cubes in your hands until they melt, chew ice cubes, listen to loud music, take a cold shower, squeeze a stress ball, pet your dog or cat</p>
<p>Movement – Do Yoga, stretch, Dance, go for a walk/hike/run/bike ride, do jumping jacks or sit ups, Practice karate or tai chi</p>	<p>Make time for something meaningful to you – Pray, Meditate, Do something kind for yourself or others, Take steps towards a goal</p>
<p>Soothe your senses – Take a warm shower/bath, listen to soothing music, light a candle or spray some essential oils, stargaze, put on your favorite lotion/cologne/perfume, bake and enjoy the smells (and tastes), make tea or coffee and enjoy it fully through your senses, smell flowers, eat your favorite food (in moderation of course) and enjoy each bite mindfully, put on your most comfortable clothes and enjoy how they feel; give yourself a manicure or pedicure</p>	<p>Clean vigorously – scrub the tub or sink, vacuum the house, organize mail/papers/clothes</p>

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During Periods of Lower Emotions	During Periods of High Emotions
<p>Imagine being someplace else – where is your favorite place? A beach? A ski slope? Someone else’s house? A Park? Go there in your mind. Imagine every detail – what sounds do you hear? What do you smell? What do you see around you?</p>	<p>Plan something awesome for when this stress is all over: a trip you will take, a party you will throw, people you will see, someplace you will go, etc. This will help you stay in the mindset that THIS WILL PASS and WILL NOT LAST FOREVER</p>
<p>Give yourself a brief vacation – turn off phones or other devices, unplug and relax momentarily to recharge yourself – emotionally and physically; take a nap, stretch, go outside and breathe some fresh air</p>	<p>Do Not Stay in Bed – Get up and shower, get dressed, go outside, eat something, etc. While you can’t do everything, you can do something...</p>
<p>Buy something (online) mindfully and within your limits so you don’t create an additional stressor</p>	<p>Call your therapist or a therapist and schedule a teletherapy session. There are many of us willing to help!</p>
<p>Be Kind to yourself – validate yourself “This is hard and I’m doing the best I can” or “This wont last forever. I will get through this.”</p>	<p>Other Ideas:</p>
<p>Set a long-term goal and determine the steps towards it and then take the first step. So if you’ve been meaning to write a blog, determine what the steps are (for example, create a list of ideas, write an article/post, decide on what forum to post it, etc) and begin to make progress.</p>	
<p>Other Ideas:</p>	

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Helpful Websites for Distraction:	
Virtual Tours of Museums around the World	https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours
Funny Dog Videos, Kids Laughing, Bloopers, Yoga or other workout videos, how to videos (makeup or fixing something around the house – there’s something for everyone!) BE MINDFUL when selecting. Pick something intentionally to improve your mood	https://www.youtube.com/
The Metropolitan Opera Streamed Online	https://www.vulture.com/2020/03/coronavirus-the-metropolitan-opera-to-stream-free-operas.html?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=s1&utm_campaign=vulture&fbclid=IwARoWYtQ4UTpprp3dm3TB-bnli8zikmpX4pNL4OzpdSgloxckZcJKJr8JlzM
Boredom Busters – Ideas for Families	https://familyguide.com/boredom-busters-110-fun-at-home-activities-for-families-kids-2/
Indoor Activities for Kids	https://www.mother.ly/child/montessori-inspired-indoor-activities?rebelltitem=4#rebelltitem4
Virtual Tour through US National Parks	https://totallythebomb.com/heres-33-national-park-tours-you-can-take-virtually-from-the-comfort-of-your-home
Podcast Ideas	https://magazine.northeast.aaa.com/category/life/technology/podcast-pulse/
Practice a Foreign Language	Duolingo app or https://www.duolingo.com/
Virtual Tour of Zoos	https://triblive.com/lifestyles/more-lifestyles/bored-kids-can-take-a-virtual-field-trip-via-zoo-websites/
Educational/Fun Ideas for Kids & Families	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EpUcd8JO3e9gTobQcqijP_bwnWWaEu_eVuGSJHsToYA/mobilebasic
Be creative!	Pinterest, Instagram... there are ideas everywhere

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Free Yoga, Online exercise Routines & exercise apps	http://www.freeyogaproject.com Tone it up, daily burn, and lots of other exercise studios and centers are offering free classes this month!
Take a free class	There are hundreds of free Ivy League classes from Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton and Yale, and I'm sure many other schools are doing the same.
Learn to Cook!	My personal fave: https://pamelasalzman.com/
Educational Resources for everyone trying to suddenly figure out homeschooling!	www.amazingeducationalresources.com
Local Libraries are offering online resources, books, games, movies, etc	Check your local library website
Stay connected with resources that keep you healthy and safe. AA is one form of support that has online meetings. There are many others. Search for what you need.	http://aa-intergroup.org/directory.php