



## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COPING WELL IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

### MENTAL HEALTH, COVID-19, AND REMOTE LEARNING

*(Adapted from Eileen Feliciano, PhD in the specialties of School and Clinical Psychology)*

While we navigate the 'new normal' we find ourselves in, here are some suggestions for how to cope. Everyone is different, so some of these may fit for you, while others may not. Please feel free to take what makes sense to you and leave what doesn't.

#### *1. Be gentle with yourself - lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance.*

We are in uncertain times. The goal is not perfection, it is the "bare sticks", the essentials. Try to 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 roadmap, no precedent, and we are all truly doing the best we can.

#### *2. Be gentle with children. Expect some changes in baseline.*

It is important to remember that the stress adults might be facing during this time of uncertainty could be mirrored in children. We are all struggling with disruption in routine, none more than children, who rely on routines constructed by others to make them feel safe and to know what comes next. Expect some changes in behaviour—hold stable and give yourself permission to prioritize relationship and emotional connection over work completion and compliance.

#### *3. Be gentle with others. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.*

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. As much as possible, try and move with grace through blowups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges and continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.

#### *4. Focus on safety and attachment - for other people as well as yourself.*

These are unsettling times for us as adults, and while it's easy to get wrapped up in meeting expectations in all domains, we can benefit from shifting our primary focus to physical safety, emotional safety, and attachment. Try to focus on strengthening connections and relationships.

#### *5. Trust your instincts; take it moment by moment.*

We have no road map for this. We don't know what this will look like in 1 day, 1 week, or 1 month from now. Uncertainty breeds anxiety, so try to focus on "chunking"—breaking things down into bite-sized pieces that feel manageable. Take each chunk one at a time, and move through stress in pieces. There is no "right way" of approaching this, and no two journeys will be the same - do what feels right and authentic for you.

## *6. Practice mindfulness. Stay in the moment.*

Looking backward to the mistakes of yesterday, last week, last month can perpetuate feelings of failure, shame, and guilt, and looking too far forward can perpetuate feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown - try to stay in the moment, on what's right in front of you in the here and now.

## *7. Develop and maintain a routine for the "new normal".*

Try to create a routine for work, play, sleep-wake, nutrition-hydration, and rest/self-care. If it works for you, be deliberate about scheduling - make it visual.

## *8. Maintain some healthy elements of old routines.*

If possible, get showered and dressed the way you normally would, as though you were going to your regular classroom. Put on some bright colors to reflect the Spring season. It is amazing how our dress can impact our mood.

## *9. Find some time to get active each day.*

Try to do something active that works for you. Walk, run, hike, and bike, or if you prefer indoors, there are many YouTube videos and online gyms that offer free movement classes.

## *10. Stay connected with others.*

Anxiety is fueled by uncertainty, but the emotion center in the brain is calmed by connection. Try to do FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, texting—connect with other people socially in a way that make sense for you. Although we are physically distant, we can always connect virtually.

## *11. Be as diligent as you can about basic self-care - get enough sleep, stay hydrated, and eat well.*

Stress and eating often do not mix well, and many of us find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, or avoiding food altogether. Nutrition, hydration and rest will help. Try to go easy on yourself though. We don't want this to become one more area where we feel like we are falling short.

## *12. Indulge a little extra in self-care.*

Consider making time for a hot bath, a facial scrub, a home hair treatment; watch your favourite shows and read your favourite books; knit, paint, draw, sculpt; grab your favourite beverage or comfort food. Or simply do nothing. There is no judgement here, and there are no rules.

## *13. Reach out for help.*

None of us have done this before and we're all in it together right now, so let's lean on each other. Many of us are learning a new way of doing life using tools and techniques that we have never used before, so collaborate with other parents if you need to. Asking for help can make us feel vulnerable, but it is important to remember that everyone needs help right now. You are not alone.

*14. Notice the good in the world, the helpers.*

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

*15. Unplug. Limit social media and COVID conversation.*

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, but consider setting a time limit for yourself on how much you consume.

*16. Find the things that bring you joy and a sense of accomplishment.*

Consider finding something that will keep you busy, distracted, engaged, happy, and fulfilled to break away from what is going on in the outside world from time to time. Organize your bookshelf, purge your closet, put together that furniture, group your toys, dive into that book you've been wanting to read, tackle a long-term project you've been putting off, a try that new recipe you've been wanting to try - nothing is off limits! It helps to anchor and ground us when the bigger things feel chaotic and are beyond our control.

*17. Find lightness and humor in each day.*

There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. It can be helpful to counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny movie, a funny meme, a practical joke—we all need a little comic relief in our day, every day.

*18. Remind yourself that this, and the uncomfortable feelings that come with it, are temporary.*

We are scared, we are stressed, we are stretched, and we are being challenged in ways we have never been challenged before - can we really do this? It seems in the midst of all the information coming at us right now that this will never end. Try to remind yourself that although this is very difficult, and will go on for an undetermined amount of time, it will pass. We will return to feeling free, safe, busy, and connected in the days ahead.

*19. Shift your mindset - find the growth and the opportunity within.*

It can be helpful to ask yourself, what can each of us learn here, in big and small ways, from this crisis? What skills are we building right now that we might not otherwise have had, that might open up future opportunities, or even a better way of doing some things? Remember, through adversity comes opportunity.

*20. Try to tolerate the uncertainty and embrace the change.*

This is much easier said than done, but if we can try and accept the situation as it is and make the best of it, it is possible that we will grow wiser and be the better for it in the end.

Resource to Explore:

<http://www.sfu.ca/olc/blog/my-ssp/mental-health-wellness-tips-quarantine>