

Wise Words from a Mental Health Professional on Dealing With Social Distancing and Anxiety

As we enter this new and unprecedented phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are inundated with guidelines about how to keep ourselves and our families healthy and virus-free.

Yet a key item on the list – social distancing – poses unprecedented challenges to our mental and emotional well-being and requires consideration. The risk may be especially high for our children, who are suddenly cut off from school and friends. *How do we as individuals and parents cope without driving ourselves and each other crazy?*

It's a question being posed to mental health professionals multiple times a day and one that urgently needs addressing. As we seek to gain steady emotional footing during this strange time, here are some tips:

1. Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing – take advantage of technology to connect widely.
2. Clear your routines and schedule, 7 days a week, to be at home.
3. Exercise and engage in physical activity, every day if possible!
4. Continue to learn and engage intellectually – read books and limit your time online.
5. Make family time positive – work to counter negativity.
6. Arrange for some alone time, outside if possible, but also inside; however, do not isolate yourself!
7. Spend time in focused meditation and relaxation.
8. Remember the things that you really enjoy doing and can take advantage of now that you are home more – and find a way to do them!
9. Limit exposure to television and online news to small windows of time, then find ways to cleanse yourself of it.
10. Don't forget to bathe daily!

Remember:

- Things will get better eventually and our lives will return to normal; the world is not collapsing (don't go "catastrophic").
- Most people are good – we will persevere and help each other.
- You are tough and have overcome challenges before - this is just a new one.
- This is a particularly strange and unprecedented situation; humor helps once in a while.
- If you have obsessive or compulsive thoughts related to the virus or the broader uncertainty, wash your hands once and then remind yourself that anxiety is normal in this scenario. But the mind also can play tricks on us. Take a deep breath and move beyond the internal discussion.
- **Live in the moment – think about today, less about the next three days and even less about next week. For now, try not to think at all about the next few months or years.**