

**Mindfulness in times of Crisis:
Anxiety, Loneliness and Depression in the COVID-19 Pandemic
-Dr. Ryan Southworth**

It is normal to feel apprehensive or anxious during times of crisis. The circumstances during COVID-19 pandemic give additional unique challenges to normal stress of everyday life. Here is some practical advice to assist each one of us throughout this time. Being mindful and honest with ourselves, observing our own feelings without passing judgment then creating a plan moving forward will empower us in these somewhat challenging times.

If you have never practiced Mindfulness before or are a bit out of practice here are three free apps that can get anyone started.



Available for download on [Android](#) and [iOS](#)



Available for download on [Android](#) and [iOS](#)

STOP, BREATHE & THINK



Available for download on [Android](#) and [iOS](#)

Here are the TOP TEN practical things each of us and our families can do:

1. Create Structure: Most of us have a somewhat chaotic schedule that must remain flexible. However, that doesn't mean we cannot each create a checklist of just 5 things we want to accomplish during the day. Most of us do this already but pay attention to your feelings as you look at the list. Does your list fill you with anxiety? If so, try creating a self-care list as well that will allow you to do something you enjoy and checking that off. Recognize your own accomplishments and allow yourself to feel good about them.
2. Shower and change out of your pajamas even if you are not going anywhere. Whatever your normal routine is for non-pandemic day, do that routine in the morning. Dress for what you want to accomplish. Obviously, this is more advice for our supportive families at home than those of us who still need to go into work, but I think it is important enough to include it.

3. Move and Sleep: Get up, go for a walk but obviously stay distant from others. Physical activity leads to endorphin release and some sunlight helps with vitamin D production. Here is a link to an article with several FREE online streaming exercise programs: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-free-online-workout-gyms-live-stream-classes-during-outbreak/> Here is a link to the CDC guidance on Managing Fatigue in times of crisis: https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2020/04/02/fatigue-crisis-hcw/?deliveryName=USCDC_170-DM24834
4. Stay Connected: Obviously we are all getting used to Zoom, Facetime etc. However, try making it a goal to call, facetime, Zoom at least 2 people outside of work or your household and connecting with them daily. Talking or reconnecting with a close friend or family member who doesn't live or work with you can allow you to have some non-work-related conversations and release those feel good chemicals in your brain.
5. Limit or Avoid Alcohol: Sales of alcohol have gone up 55% since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Alcohol hits those parts of the brain numbing us to any isolation related loneliness, anxiety and depression. It is a powerful drug that when misused will deplete your ability to be resilient and will thus become counterproductive.
6. Control: When you get stressed, physically write the things down that are causing the stress. After you have a list of stressors take another sheet of paper and divide it down the middle. On left, title is "THINGS I CAN CONTROL" on the right "THINGS I CANNOT CONTROL". Categorize your stressors under these headings, do not judge your feelings while reading these lists just observe your feelings and take note of them.
7. Take Advantage of Time at Home: Think of old passions and renew them. Music, walking, playing an instrument, writing, drawing, reading, study of Spiritual and Religious beliefs. Look at any time at home or "isolated" as a gift to pursue what you enjoy.
8. Ask For Support When You Need It: Some anxiety is normal. However, if it affects your motivation, ability to act or is severely interfering with your sleep, seek help through professional counseling. There are many online tele-counselors available and often insurance will cover these visits.



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9. Change Your Perspective: Mr. Rogers had been asked by many children what to do about the Fear they felt when tragedy struck. He relayed a story of his youth that stuck with him. He stated, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." This shift in perspective, instead of looking at the crushed building, smoke and rubble he started to see the people helping to lift, searching, carrying others. Fear turned into gratitude and a desire to lift and help others. Perspective can be a powerful thing.

10. Set Limits: Limit your personal time on social media and the news. A constant subconscious barrage of negativity and sensationalism will wear down the mind. If you are a Facebook user, learn to use the "snooze" function for some friends, family members or news organizations that come up on your feed. This will not post them for 30 days to give you a break.

Things will get better,

Doc S

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