



ESTABLISHING A NEW NORMAL FOR HOME



When so many things are changing rapidly, it's hard to consider investing energy into a new routine. It may feel like the moment you get settled into it, things will likely change again. That's valid; however, the reality is that nothing you're experiencing now is similar to anything you've done or been through before and that can be very unsettling in the day to day.

In order to establish a new normal, knowing it could change again soon, try taking a lighter approach.

Take 15 - 20 min and ask yourself these questions:

1. What is expected of me right now related to my work, my parenting, my caregiving, etc?
2. Are there any patterns that emerge in those expectations? For example, if you have to log into work each day at 8:30 AM and your child has to log into school each day at 9:00 AM, then there is potential for overlapping priorities and that creates a pattern. Take a moment to consider what overlaps occur in your day to day priorities.
3. Once you have a sense of the patterns, how might you construct your daily routine? In the example above, if you need to be logged into work at 8:30 AM and your child needs to be logged into school at 9:00 AM, then you know that your child needs to be up and ready to start their day when you need to be online.

Here is a sample morning routine for that example:

7:00 AM - Wake up and shower

7:30 AM - Get dressed/personal grooming routine

8:00 AM - Breakfast

8:15 AM - Help children get ready for their daily school work

8:30 AM - Log into work

9:00 AM - Help child log into school

4. The next thing to consider once you have a general timeline for your day is to consider whether it's realistic. This is perhaps the most important part of establishing a healthy new normal that supports your well-being in difficult times. We attempt to be excellent. We forget the emotional work load of responding to challenges that arise. Create a routine with lots of flexibility.
5. Consider what you need for self care, like frequent breaks, time to move your body, time to prepare food, and time for relaxation. Build these things into your daily plan.

Perhaps, it feels overwhelming to create something like this when in a few weeks it may change again. However, having an understanding of your needs and priorities and how they will be met throughout the day can be very helpful. If you live with other people, be sure everyone is aware of the daily plan and invite them to be helpful team members. Write the plan down somewhere where everyone can see it and refer to it.

Remember, the goal of this plan is not to live perfectly within it, the goal is to have a semblance of order. There will be many opportunities that require flexibility from the plan. Grant yourself and those around you flexibility when necessary and extra grace and kindness. The daily plan should help orient your household in a new way that gives everyone a framework.



ESTABLISHING A NEW NORMAL FOR WORK



As things continue to rapidly change, finding a new normal for work will be an evolving process. An assertive language skill set is important to ensure everyone's needs are being met while maintaining respect and dignity for all.

Assertiveness is a key communication skill that provides clear information in a manner that upholds dignity and respect for all involved. It is important to remember that assertive is neither aggressive nor passive. Applying this skill set will allow you, and others to:

1. Communicate what information you are looking for.
2. Communicate your needs for clarity around processes and/or projects being asked of you.
3. Clearly communicate your boundaries.
4. Share how you are doing overall (physical, mental and emotional well-being are important factors when it comes to being a productive employee).

Below are some examples of assertive language to help you communicate effectively.

"I read the company email relating to flexible work schedules. I am grateful they have considered our circumstances. Does this mean that I will be able to complete some work in the evening hours after my kids go to bed? How will that impact our team calls? I think I can be available for our team calls, but I wanted to clarify expectations."

"I think there may be some new opportunities for revenue given people's need for home office equipment in light of the situation. Are there opportunities for us to build our business in that way, or are we sticking to our standard customer base? If I can move forward with those ideas, who do I need to include and work alongside?"

"I want to make everyone aware that my children are nearby and I have done my best to occupy them for the duration of the call. If they should pop into our call, please have patience and know that I am doing my best."

The most important thing about establishing a new normal is to remember that we are all in this together and nobody has gone through what we are all currently experiencing.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Everyone is doing their best to make the best of the situation as it challenges us and continuously evolves.
2. Gentleness, patience, kindness, and respect are of utmost importance.
3. When emotions and stress are heightened, people often grant themselves permission to be harder on others or on themselves. Make every effort to avoid this. It makes everything much harder and stresses already overloaded emotional states.



MANAGING ANXIETY



There is no right or wrong emotional response to the global pandemic the world is experiencing. Due to the multiple unknown factors during this crisis, many people are feeling anxious. It can be challenging to avoid feeling fear and uncertainty when many things are outside of your control. This resource offers a few tips for responding to feelings of fear and anxiety when they arise.

Your mental and emotional well-being are as important as your physical well-being. If you are feeling routinely panicked and unable to find a feeling of calm, please seek support through your companies Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if one is available or reach out to your primary care physician. Other resources include:

- » International Crisis Support: crisistextline.org/international
- » Substance Abuse Support: samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline
- » Suicide Prevention (US): (English): 1-800-273-8255 (tel:18002738255), (Español): 1-888-628-9454 (tel:18886289454), Text: HOME to 741-741
- » Download SAMHSA Suicide Safe APP
- » Domestic Violence Support (US): 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522, Visit: thehotline.org

Here are some tips to respond to your feelings of anxiety and fear:

1. **MINDFULNESS:** Mindfulness is the practice of being present and paying attention. Everyone will be multi-tasking more than usual during this time of uncertainty. As often as possible, create time to do just one thing. For example, close out your email when working on projects so you can focus without distraction. If possible, take a few minutes each day to be silent and let your mind, body and soul rest.
2. **STRETCHING:** Being quarantined in your house can make you feel cramped. Stretching can take a few minutes and make your body feel more expansive and release physical tension.
3. **5-4-3-2-1:** Take a moment to notice five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, one thing you can taste. This practice can bring you back into the present moment and bring awareness to your body. This practice is really helpful when you find yourself processing all of the potential outcomes and current unknowns or feel your thoughts spiraling.
4. **GRATITUDE:** Pause and give energy to being thankful. What are you grateful for? This practice helps even if you don't say them out loud. Gratitude is a powerful skill in your toolkit. It is a very helpful response to feelings of scarcity and comparison and has actually been shown to lead to higher levels of happiness.

The best way to respond to your emotions is to first acknowledge them so that you can respond accordingly. Emotions are not right or wrong. They are simply information. You can notice your feelings, acknowledge what is happening for you and respond kindly and gently with yourself.



SOCIAL DISTANCING AND CONNECTION CARE



Social connection is a key part of our well-being. In times of social distancing, it might seem like a good idea to create a lot of extra support to socially connect with people. However, right now, the best thing is to be intentional about social connection and ensure when you are connecting that it is high quality. In some ways you are now more connected to friends, family, and even coworkers than ever before.

Perhaps you're on more video calls, your family created a group chat, or your kids are on group chats and logged into virtual classrooms. In some ways, you have a lot more people virtually in your household than ever before. You may have a lot of social connection that can be overwhelming and still leave you feeling a little lonely. In other instances you might have a lot less connection and find yourself missing the people you normally surround yourself with.

Quality connection is really important for your emotional and mental health. Here are some strategies for focusing on quality connections:

- » **Check in on those you care about.** You may have elderly neighbors or relatives that are more exposed during this time. Give them a call to see if they need anything (perhaps grocery delivery) or if they just need somebody to chat with. They may be feeling alone and afraid, and knowing you care will help ease their minds.
- » **Avoid connection that amplifies your anxiety.** Some people connect through fear or what researcher and author Brene Brown calls "Common Enemy Connection" which is when people find all the things they dislike together. These types of connection aren't fully nourishing. Does this mean you can't talk about what scares you right now? No, in fact it can be very helpful to talk about what scares you or what you are feeling. Be sure that the connections you seek are positive overall and allow all parties to support each other during this time of uncertainty.
- » **Find someone to have the conversation with** who acknowledges your fears and reminds you that you are safe and loved. Conversely, some people hear your fear and pile on with more fear and anxiety. This is not helpful to either person.
- » **Prioritize connection that invites goodwill, kindness, joy, laughter, and peace.** Based on the science of human connection, the saying "misery loves company" is true, but so is the saying "joy loves company." People adopt the behaviors that others endorse. Find the right people to spend virtual social time with who will fill your bucket.

The [*Power of Social Connection*](#) is so strong that WELCOA has deemed 2020 the [*Year of Social Connection*](#). And now in the face of a global pandemic, see how [*WELCOA is helping you connect*](#).



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT HOME



Movement is important and can be even more so in a crisis to support not just our physical health, but also our mental and emotional health. When individuals start to feel shut in, cramped, and anxious, physical movement can help them feel expansive and relaxed.

However, your physical activity is more limited right now because of your inability to go to a gym, or group fitness class, or meet up with a running group. Try to focus on a few small opportunities of physical activity rather than a big sweeping change to your activity routine.

HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT HOME:

1. Take several small 15 minute breaks to walk outside when the weather allows.
2. Climb the stairs in your home if you have them.
3. *Yoga With Adriene* is a good free yoga channel on YouTube.
4. Local fitness companies are offering virtual group classes without leaving your home, which is a good way to get exercise and support small businesses right now.
5. Stretching counts! Do a quick series of stretches to help you feel expansive when you might be stuck inside.
6. Spell your workout. There are many creative workouts where you do certain exercises for each letter and you spell out your name or a phrase. Simply do a quick online search for spell your workout and take your pick!
7. Get the kids involved. You may have kids at home (or even neighbors) that are missing out on their activities right now as well. Invite the neighbors out for a fun driveway workout with everybody in their own driveways doing jumping jacks, yoga, or a fun dance party. The kids and adults will both love this!

Remember that physical activity isn't really about maintaining a healthy weight. It's about giving your body what it needs. We were designed to move. To reward you when you engage in movement, you also get lower stress levels, increased happy hormones for your brain, and decreased risk for injury. Get moving in whatever way works best for you!



NUTRITIOUS FOOD



Social distancing has created an increased opportunity to get healthy food into your body. Without the need to pack a lunch, or the convenience of fast food on the way to your next meeting, many people are eating at home a lot more. To invest in healthy food for your body, mind, and soul follow these guidelines.

- » **Food is meant to nourish you.** It is meant to be eaten and enjoyed and usually in good company. Create meal times that allow you to eat and connect with others. This could be family meals or sharing a meal virtually with a friend. Avoid eating while working.
- » **There is no such thing as a super food.** Have you ever stopped to think how often we act as if food has the power to condemn you or save you? It is important to remember that it does not. Right now, you may find yourself craving more carbohydrates. Stress does that. It's okay. It is a natural response to what's happening. If you indulge in some junk food, it's okay. You will live. You will also find ways to nourish yourself later. Food perfection is not the goal right now. Nourishment is the goal. Don't sweat it if you eat a candy bar in a moment of stress. You'll recover later.
- » **Try to make half of your meals fruits, vegetables, and/or beans.** This will naturally build a healthy plate. It's an easy approach and a good start to a nutritious meal.
- » **Do not try to overhaul your diet right now.** Just do your best day to day and fill your body with food that nourishes it.
- » **Don't judge yourself for buying non-perishables.** Since everyone is trying to take less trips to the grocery store, you may be stocking up on canned and frozen fruits, vegetables, and beans. That's okay. These non-perishable versions of food are just as nutritious.

Always be sure to get nutrition information and guidance from Registered Dietitians. Here are some good websites to follow for more information:

<https://livelytable.com/>

<https://www.theleangreenbean.com/>

<https://www.abbeyskitchen.com/>



REST AND PLAY



Twenty-five percent of American adults report insufficient sleep or rest at least fifteen out of every thirty days. Sleep is required to fight infection, support metabolism of sugar, make positive decisions, think creatively, and manage stress. Lack of sleep contributes to a variety of chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and depression.

In the book Wholehearted Living, Brene Brown said 'Let go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth.' Now more than ever, this guidance is important.

In our society, there are a lot of common beliefs about rest. It is believed to be a luxury, or that people who rest more are lazy. It is believed that productivity is what makes us worthy. In this time of uncertainty, imperfection abounds. Everyone is doing their best and taking things hour by hour to make it through. This experience is exhausting because you are managing so many new ways of working and existing.

Play, or purposeless, all-consuming fun, is a biological need, as integral to our health as sleep or nutrition. People are designed by nature to flourish through play. Respecting your biologically programmed need for play can transform your work. It can bring excitement and newness to your job. It shapes your brain, helps you foster empathy, and is at the core of creativity and innovation. Just a little bit permeates through the rest of your life making you more productive and happier.

As the duration of this pandemic continues, consider investing in some play and rest by incorporating some of the following:

- » If you have young kids, play a game of hide-and-seek or blow bubbles outside on a beautiful day.
- » Take time to read a book.
- » Enjoy time just sitting and relaxing on a sunny day.
- » Turn on your favorite music and dance.
- » Take a nap or go to bed earlier than normal.
- » Play a virtual game with friends.
- » Go for a walk and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature.
- » Go for a bike ride.

Whatever you decide to do, the most important thing is to enjoy it. Making time to play and rest will pay dividends when it comes to your mood, your health and overall well-being.



LEVERAGING YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IN A PANDEMIC



Draw a stick figure with a circle around it. Next, draw a circle around the first circle and then draw one more circle around your second circle. You should have a stick figure in a circle and two more circles around that.

You are the stick figure. Inside the first circle with you are all of the things you can control. You can control what you eat, when you refill your water bottle, how you write your next email, and what you buy during your next grocery store run. In the next circle you have the things you can influence. These are things in which you can have some impact, but cannot fully control. Examples include the outcome of your next team based work project, or the way in which your child completes their homework. In both of these examples, you have influence in the situation, but you do not have entire control.

In the last circle you will find all of the things that are outside of your control. In a pandemic, you may be wishing you drew it a little bigger because it feels a lot bigger. For example, right now, it is out of one's control whether their grocery store has toilet paper or if work hours are reduced. There are a lot of things that are very much out of our control during a global pandemic.

This exercise is helpful in centering on the things you can control and influence. For many, anxiety increases when there are a lot of unknowns and a lot of things out of our control. The tendency when things feel out of control is to start planning for the worst. Instead, take a moment to complete this exercise and be intentional about how you exist in the things you can control, like how you respond to your next email. Focus on what you can positively influence and allow yourself to release the things in that last circle, which you cannot control.



FINANCIAL WELL-BEING



Financial security, or lack thereof, has a major impact on many areas of your life. Many people often equate financial security to increased income, but in reality, money management is the key. The weight of financial burden is heavy and during a global pandemic, it is something that many are feeling. Lost work, lost business, reduced hours, and uncertainty are creating financial concerns for many.

Financial stress impacts so many aspects of your life, including your IQ, decision making abilities, and even your interest in doing good for others. It also impacts your appetite and puts stress on your digestive system, both making it difficult to eat a diet that supports your health. The stress of it all can keep you up at night or cause restless sleep, which can impact your ability to think clearly and disrupt hormone balance leading to weight gain, and other health complications such as heart disease and diabetes.

Getting to a place where you can take better care of yourself in the midst of stress, especially financial stress, is no small task. However, you don't have to do it alone.

Here are some tips and resources to help you move from financial stress to financial freedom:

- » **Meet with a financial planner.** Having a third party that is not emotionally attached to the situation can be quite helpful and enlightening.
- » **Create a budget.** Knowing what money you have coming in and what expenses you have will help you determine areas that you may be able to cut back on spending.
- » **Ask someone in your Human Resources department** about any financial wellness resources your company has. Often times, the company that supports your retirement benefits offers free guidance to employees. Some companies may also have financial wellness programs, many of which will address concerns directly relating to the pandemic. Also, check out whether your company has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which often offers many different financial support resources and advisement.
- » **Visit <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/>** to see a list of consumer resources to protect and manage your finances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial challenges are often associated with feelings of shame or guilt. Many people feel like they can't tell anyone if they are struggling. Find someone you trust, who will have compassion for your situation and use that connection to ease your stress and shame so that you can move forward. You will also likely find that you are not alone. Sometimes just knowing you are not alone in your experiences will help you to reduce some of the stress associated with them.



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS



Under normal circumstances, it may make sense to expect that you keep the level of deliverables the same regardless of whether you are working from home or in the office. However, during a global pandemic, people need to be more flexible with each other and themselves. You may be trying to help your kids continue to learn while maintaining your job or perhaps sharing space and resources with a spouse, partner or roommates. You may be trying to salvage your work and financial stability, maybe even adding a second job to subsidize. You may be in the healthcare or public health space and finding yourself on the front lines of this pandemic.

The reality is that people are dealing with a lot right now, and it is not realistic for us to be able to double our workload and maintain the same output. Perhaps someone can do so for a day or a week, and some tasks or obligations might require you to do so from time to time, but you will eventually experience burnout. Here are some ways that you can proactively manage what is being expected of you during this difficult time.

Adjust How You Think About a Work Day

One silver lining in all of this is that technological advancements now allow many of us to do work from virtually anywhere. For most computer-based or collaborative work, the reality is that it can happen anywhere, any time. During the pandemic, it will be helpful to discuss with your manager and team members what their thoughts are for completing work within a more fluid and flexible time frame. For example, if you or your coworkers are having to provide school lessons for kids in the middle of the day, you may need to work after hours to complete some tasks.

As you begin to think about how to have a conversation with your manager about expectations for what your work day will look like, take heart that he or she is probably already thinking about how to shift expectations as well. This can be a great opportunity for you to build a healthier work relationship where you have some capacity to influence, moderate, and co-determine work outcomes.

4 Great Ideas to Help Manage Expectations

- » **Focus on mission critical performance deliverables** rather than specific work hours. This demonstrates that you understand what absolutely has to get done, and you have thought about how to execute it.
- » **Talk with your manager about benchmarks of work rather than logging tasks.** While it may seem tempting to log how you are spending your time on specific tasks, that will just create more work that may get in the way of executing critical performance deliverables. Suggest a discussion of daily or weekly milestones so you and your manager are both confident that you are proactively tracking toward success.
- » **Ask your boss to provide clarity** about “mission critical” benchmarks for each week. Suggest a series of Monday meetings to review them quickly together.
- » **Discuss more fluid needs for work deliverables.** For example, if you are working with your kids at home, you may want to let your boss know that you will be available throughout the standard 9-5 day, but that your focused delivery may happen later in the evening after kids go to bed.



FINDING BALANCE

Kids and Work and Well-being for Everyone



This. Is. Hard. Right now you may be trying to work full time, help school aged kids continue lessons, and/or care for and entertain younger children. To believe you will be able to maintain a similar work/school load and home schedule is unrealistic. Everyone will need to adjust to find a balance that works.

Start by adjusting and becoming realistic about your own capacity.

- » Communicate with your employer about your desire to continue doing a great job, and your need for adjusted expectations for the duration of the time you are working from home with kid(s) there too.
- » Communicate with your children's school teacher(s) about your desire to be a supportive parent, and your need to be realistic with your capacity to complete a full curriculum while balancing your own workload as well.
- » Consider creating a schedule that will allow you to be fully present in your parenting and in your work. If you can't compartmentalize your work in this way, consider smaller blocks of time where you can focus on one thing or the other. It will be very difficult to spend every day attempting to be present during work, childcare and schooling all at the same time.
- » If you are co-parenting and your partner is also working from home, you may be able to trade hours in which for one hour you focus on the kids while your partner works and then vice versa.
- » If you are a single parent with a situation where your kids go to another parent's house for part of the week, you may want to talk to your employer about focusing your work more heavily on the days when your kids are at the other parent's house.

When it comes to helping keep your kids' brains active, there are a few things to consider:

- » Give yourself a lot of grace. You are not expected to be a perfect teacher or introduce a lot of new learning and curriculum. Simply keep their brains active with activities like, reading, art, physical activity, etc.
- » The most important thing is to simply provide your kid(s) with love and understanding as they are dealing with a lot of big emotions during this difficult time as well.
- » Focus on providing a schedule for your kid(s). Routine and schedules make their environment more predictable, which is even more important in a time of high unpredictability.
- » Ask family members, neighbors or friends to video conference with your kid(s) to read them books or just chat about their day.
- » Your children do not need to focus on schoolwork for 6 hours each day. Have fun learning and take time to simply play games or do puzzles.

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There are a lot of free online learning resources available to help you keep young minds active. Look through the following resources for ones that work best for you and your little ones:

[Virtual Field Trips](#)

[Starfall](#)

[Dreamscape](#)

[Scholastic Learn at Home](#)

[Highlights Kids](#)

[Kids Discover](#)

[PBS Learning Media](#)

[Storyline Online](#)

[Time for Kids](#)

[National Geographic Kids](#)

[Wonderopolis](#)

[GoNoodle](#)

[ABCYa](#)

[Learning A-Z](#)

[Fun Brain](#)

[Brain Pop](#)

You are not expected to be the world's best teacher, parent or employee during this time. You will have good days and rough days, and that is okay. Be open and honest with your employer, your partner and your kid(s) and ask for help when you need it.



CONNECTION, EMPATHY AND COMPASSION



People need connection to thrive physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. Your relationships shape your biology as well as your experiences. Connection is so important, in fact, that The Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) has named 2020 the [Year of Social Connection](#) and has reinforced that during this time of [COVID-19 and social isolation](#).

Social Connection

The research shows time and time again that humankind requires connection. Your well-being depends on it. The single most influential predictor of human happiness is the quality of a person's relationships, even above money. Here are some simple steps to improve connection:

- » Listen as much as you share
- » Express appreciation and gratitude
- » Invest in the development of others
- » Explain your reasoning
- » Respect your own and others' struggles related to change
- » Ask for others' opinions

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to relate to another person's feelings. Compassion is a feeling of concern for someone else's misfortune. As the challenges of this circumstance continue, even as they come to an end, our co-workers, family members, and neighbors will thrive if we can all leverage empathy and compassion.

When responding to other people's misfortune, discomfort, or pain avoid statements that begin with "at least." Lean into statements that acknowledge others challenges such as, "That does sound very difficult."

Compassion

Being of service to others in the wake of this crisis will require empathy, which will, in turn, drive your compassion. Being more compassionate will help inspire you to do what you can, when you can to make the world a better, brighter place.

Being a part of a wholesome community begins with your ability to access and spread empathy and compassion. Hopefully this resource gives you some quick tips to help you lean into empathy, fuel your compassion, and improve your connections.



SETTING UP YOUR HOME OFFICE



Having a nice quiet place to work is very meaningful. You may be experiencing how difficult that can be at home. Even if you have a dedicated home office space, you may now be sharing it with other people who also need access to a home office space.

When setting up a home office, consider these things:

1. Access to wifi. Many have taken the time to set up lovely home offices only to find that their wifi does not work well in that area of the house, or does not have the capacity to handle the work they are doing. Check your wifi connection before spending a lot of time setting everything up. Communicate with your employer if you are having connectivity issues and ask for ideas for how to improve it.
2. Ideally, find a place that has a door that you can close to help reduce noise. If that is not an option, try to find the quietest space available or use white noise apps to limit external noise. There are several free white noise apps available for download with a simple search.
3. Be sure there is adequate lighting. Task lights, or lights that can focus on a document or particular area, can be very useful if you only have access to a room that has poor lighting. Ideally, you would also include natural lighting in your office area, as research has proven that natural lighting helps people be more productive, happier, healthier and more calm.
4. Consider some basics of proper ergonomics:
 - » Make sure your computer screen is directly in front of you so that you aren't turning your head to view it. If possible adjust it to eye level. Ideally your eyes while looking forward will hit the top of the screen and easily read downward. If you have a laptop you can prop it up on some books and use a separate keyboard.
 - » Your keyboard should be at or below elbow level. If your only keyboard is on your laptop, and you have another monitor available, you can place the laptop where the keyboard is at the proper level and use the monitor at the appropriate eye-level.
 - » Your legs should be at a 90 degree angle at the knee. If your feet don't touch the ground consider grabbing a small stool or box and place it under your feet. If your legs are too long for the chair and your knees are cramped, try to raise your chair, place an extra cushion on the chair, or find a chair that fits you better.
 - » The goal is not to sit up right all day long. That is unrealistic. Find a way to recline slightly backward so that you are not supporting your posture through your core all day long. This could be accomplished by adjusting the lumbar on your chair, if possible, or adding a small pillow behind your back.

Most importantly, create a space that feels peaceful to you. Visual surroundings play a big role in your sense of well-being. Small things like adding a plant to your office space, or tidying your desk at the end of each day can make a big difference.



BEING AN INFLUENCER FOR GOOD



Stress, anxiety, fear, and grief are all higher than normal during this global pandemic, and everyone is suffering from the same circumstances. In other natural disasters, they may be isolated to a specific location, and, while many people may feel impacted by what occurred, you can generally say that those in the geographic location of the disaster were impacted the most. In this case, people around the world are being impacted by this. Collective suffering is high, which also means collective need for kindness and gentleness with each other is high.

Social scientists have studied how we influence each other and found that people adopt behaviors that are endorsed by others, especially those who are nearest to them. So the old saying *misery loves company* is true. However, this also runs true for joy, respect, and kindness. Some days it can seem like the world is cold and unforgiving; however, through small intentional micro-moments of love, kindness, and joy, it can feel better. Here are some ways to intentionally and positively influence those around you.

1. As you find yourself feeling grateful or hopeful, find an intentional way to share that with others.
2. If you notice that someone is feeling down, reach out to that person and share kindness and compassion.
3. If you find yourself in the middle of a tense conversation, address it with kindness. You can say, “This conversation feels very tense, I believe because <insert the reason>. Is that a correct observation? What can we do to alleviate that?”
4. Connect with your friends, coworkers and family to share ideas on ways to help find happiness during this difficult time. Sharing your ideas with each other allows you to connect and help each other with new things to try out. Some ideas may include journaling, coloring, crafting, cleaning, reading, etc.

When you’re interacting with other people, you can influence the culture of that experience by choosing calm, gentle, and kind language. Be intentional about lifting others up, which in turn, will lift you up as well.



GRATITUDE



Gratitude is one of the most powerful tools in your personal toolkit. It lowers stress and alleviates a scarcity mindset, or one in which it feels like we never have enough. Gratitude makes it possible to have more meaningful connections and can significantly increase well-being and life satisfaction, as shown in the research by UC Davis psychologist Robert Emmons. A key thing to remember when expressing gratitude is that it should be specific. The more specific, the more meaningful it is to you and to the person receiving it. Try incorporating some of these ideas into your daily routine and make gratitude a regular practice in your life.

1. Start or end each day by sending two or three emails, texts or social media messages to coworkers, friends, and family that you feel grateful for.
2. Take a gratitude walk. As you walk, think through the things you are grateful for at that moment, starting with the basics. For example, “I am grateful for the trees, for the five minutes to take this walk, for the fresh air.” Then move deeper into your gratitude with more specific concepts. Your mind will wander and that’s okay. Simply bring it back to your gratitude as often as possible.
3. Play the game ‘*High, Low, Cheer!*’ with your family at dinner time. Each person shares something that went really well in their day, something that didn’t go well in their day, which gives the opportunity to have connection in one’s hardships too, and something or someone they are grateful for or want to cheer for.
4. Write thank you notes each week and put them in the mail. There is something so special about a handwritten thank you note and you will find that you and the recipient will both appreciate this so much.
5. Practice gratitude meditation. There are free apps available that will take you through gratitude meditations, like *Calm* or *Headspace*. You can search for gratitude-specific apps in the app store of your choice.

Gratitude can be shared, or it can be practiced internally. Either way, it pays dividends. The more you do it, the easier it gets, and the more natural it becomes for your brain to consider what you are grateful for. During this difficult time, it feels like a lot of things are out of our control and stress levels are high. Now, more than ever, be intentional about noticing what is going well and lean into the feelings of gratitude.



WHAT'S GOING WELL?



This seems like an absurd question to ask right now. However, it's a meaningful one. In the midst of so much change, we are often able to gain a lot of insight that can result in long-term lifestyle improvements. Take a moment and let yourself wonder a bit. Have the changes you have had to make because of the pandemic revealed any truths about yourself or your life that may be meaningful? Grab a pen and jot down the answer or just meditate on these few questions:

1. What changes have I been forced to make during this time have actually made my life *better*?"
2. What were the things that I kept up—even in the midst of losing control over so many areas of my life—because they were the most important?"
3. In the past two weeks, what has brought me joy?
4. What is no longer happening in my life that has been surprisingly relieving?
5. What have I been able to invest in that has been meaningful?
6. What do I hope to keep after this is over?

In some ways, your life may have become more hectic than ever. You may be trying to help your kids continue to learn while maintaining your job. You may be trying to salvage your work and financial stability. You may be on the front lines of this pandemic and literally saving the world right now.

For every cloud there is a silver lining, and goodness is happening in the midst of the chaos. Here are some great examples of the goodness happening during this global pandemic:

- » Hospital ER admissions are down because they are being judicious with their medical resources and helping people engage with their primary care doctor to manage chronic conditions and other non-emergent issues.
- » There are much less carbon emissions going into the atmosphere with less car and air travel occurring.
- » Many companies have done a really good job taking very good care of their employees and there is a re-invigorated sense of care and concern for each other.
- » Families are spending more time together because extra-curricular activities have been cancelled.
- » Dogs (and cats!) everywhere are happier that their humans are home.

When we acknowledge the good, it is not an avoidance of the hard. These things coexist. The hard stuff is front and center right now, but it is important to acknowledge the good. It's acceptable to think or dream about what your new normal might look like after the threat of this pandemic is managed.



IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY



Let's talk for a moment about grief and trauma. If someone is in a car accident or if someone you know dies, there is a center of grief and trauma. In the very center are the people directly impacted by that, then layered outside of that circle are those people's friends and family. A layer outside of that are those people's friends and family. In those circumstances, the people who are not directly impacted can respond helpfully because they are not so focused on their own grief that they are unable to support others.

The situation you are in is different; in a pandemic, everyone is impacted. Psychologists call this collective trauma. The one good thing about collective trauma is that you can share it with other people. People around you experience the same thing as you, and you can lean into each other.

The challenge of that is that no one is unaffected by the trauma. There is a feeling of having nowhere to go to lean on others because everyone is struggling. You are learning to hold your own emotional needs and care for others' equally and simultaneously. Sometimes what you need is going to be in direct conflict to what someone else needs. Here are some helpful considerations in collective trauma.

1. It's okay to know that you are not capable of supporting someone else's grief processing. When you are not feeling able to fulfill someone else's needs, you can say something like, "I really want to be there for you, but in this moment, I am not doing so well myself and I don't think I will be much help."
2. If you reach out to someone to talk about what is challenging you, start by asking this, "I need to connect, but I want to make sure you are in a place where you feel okay. I know we are all going through this. Do you feel up to sharing with each other right now?"
3. When someone isn't in a place to share with you or support you, don't take it personally. Everyone is doing their best.

It's okay to not be okay. You are experiencing something that you have never experienced. There will be a lot of feelings that may surprise you. Notice these feelings without judging them as good or bad, worthy or unworthy. There is not a right or wrong way to respond to what you are experiencing. The important thing is to allow yourself to feel what you are feeling, but not live it in. Give yourself grace and time, and then take it one day or one hour at a time. Find ways to build yourself back up, and keep moving forward.



BOOSTING YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM



Did you know that having purposeful work can boost your immune system? When you hear talk about boosting immunity you may think of the fancy tea in the special foods section of the grocery store, or you brace yourself to hear about the next “superfood” that you’ll have to eat whether you like it or not.

Here are some other ways, beyond tea or fads, science has helped us understand how your body responds physically with enhanced immunity.

- » **PURPOSEFUL WORK AND LIVING:** Eudaimonic happiness (being a part of something bigger than yourself) compared to hedonic happiness (seeking instant pleasure) has been correlated with better immune function.
- » **HUMAN CONNECTION:** Caring for others and connecting with others also leads us to eudaimonic happiness. Once again the results in your cells is similar, leading to better immune function. It is important in this time of physical distancing to stay socially connected.
- » **FRUITS AND VEGETABLES:** Did you know that fruits and vegetables have their own immune systems? That’s right! Plants have to fight off pests and diseases too. Your immune function originates in your gut where you digest your food. There is a strong correlation between a diet that prioritizes fruits and vegetables and your immune system. So you don’t have to opt for pricey specialty or fad foods; you can simply get what you need in the produce section of your store.
- » **SLEEP:** Studies show that sleep is an important part of a healthy immune system. When you sleep, your body releases germ fighting proteins called cytokines. A healthy amount of sleep is generally 7-8 hours, but can vary per person. Quality sleep is uninterrupted sleep, which can be difficult to obtain. You may want to try eye covers or ear plugs to reduce interruptions.

In addition to these ways of boosting your immunity, it is also important to practice good hygiene. Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently. Cover your cough with your elbow, and avoid touching your face.



MEDICAL CONSUMERISM DURING A PANDEMIC



It can be hard to know how and when to access medical care during a pandemic. There can be a lot of rapidly evolving information. There can also be a lot of misinformation.

Medical consumerism is the practice of choosing your medical care wisely. Just like you are a consumer of food or clothing, you are also a consumer of your medical care. To make smart choices consider the following:

1. If you think you might have COVID-19 follow these [recommendations made by the CDC](#).
2. If you are sick for other reasons and aren't sure if you should see your doctor, you can always call and talk it through with your primary care physician. Many doctors are using telehealth right now. Telehealth is a virtual visit. If you have never done something like this and it feels overwhelming, that's okay. Your doctor will walk you through it. The most important step is to reach out to your primary care doctor and get their recommendation on next steps.
3. Avoid emergency rooms unless absolutely necessary. If you aren't sure if you need emergency care and choose to go, be aware that many hospitals are assessing people at the door to determine if it's the right place for you to receive care. This is to keep everyone safe. There is no need to be exposed to other illness if it's not absolutely necessary.
4. Pharmacies are staying open and, like hospitals, they may meet you at your car rather than have you come into the store. Many pharmacies also have drive-through areas that would be better to limit exposure.
5. If you have a chronic condition like diabetes, high cholesterol, or blood pressure, reach out to your insurance company. They may have special nurses (often referred to as case managers) who can help you manage your health to keep you out of doctors' offices and hospitals. These programs have been around for a long time, and now is a great time to take advantage of them.

Remember to make good decisions with your doctor. Be sure to get information from accurate and trusted sources like the Center for Disease Control, Mayo Clinic, or professionals through your health insurance company.



MINDFUL MINI BREAKS

The Power of Meditative Breathing



You have likely seen in a sitcom when someone is panicking and they are given a paper bag to breathe into. It turns out this isn't just good comedic content, it's actually a good practice to calm our bodies and respond to overwhelming feelings of stress. The good news is that you don't need the paper bag.

When you begin to feel overwhelmed, regardless of the reason, you can take a time out. In your personal time-out, use your breath to bring you some calm.

1. Find a quiet place to sit comfortably.
2. Focus on your breath.
3. Inhale through your nose for three seconds, hold that breath for two seconds, and exhale through your mouth for four seconds. You don't need to have a timer, simply count slowly in your head.
4. Pay attention to the feeling of your lungs expanding, the sound of your breathing, or any other aspect of the breath that keeps you focused.
5. You can close your eyes or leave them open. The important thing is to keep focused for about 5-7 minutes on your breathing.

This simple act is incredibly helpful in reducing stress and anxiety. The more you do it, the better the benefits. During stressful times, like this global pandemic, it is not necessary to make any big changes in your health and wellness routines. In fact, what you really need is to find small ways to re-center which will help with the big emotions that occur in response to this crisis, and just do the next right thing.

Working from Home: How to Stay Productive and Connected



Technology has changed the way we work.

Thanks to productivity and communication tools like email, video conferencing, collaboration software, social tools, content sharing and of course, the Cloud, remote workers can actively engage and stay connected with their colleagues as never before – even when not working side-by-side in an office.

This is especially important in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Companies that can continue operations with their employees working from home are jumping at the opportunity to protect the safety and wellbeing of their workforce – and the public at large. But, working from home is not as easy as it may appear – it's not a skill

that comes naturally to many. In normal remote working circumstances, daily distractions from children, pets, and household chores, can make working from home difficult. Couple that with social isolation, digital collaboration challenges, sluggish residential network bandwidth and a totally new physical work environment, productivity can seem downright impossible. The current health crisis brought on by COVID-19 only exacerbates these challenges. But with the right guidance and support, you can be both engaged and productive working remotely. Read on for tips to help you stay on-task and connected when you can't be in the office.



Follow a structured daily routine

Follow your normal morning routine and “arrive” to work on time. It’s important to take your usual breaks throughout the day and to put your work away when the business day is over. You’ll reduce distractions and stress by sticking to a schedule that closely mirrors an in-office routine. Try to start your day with a 10-minute walk, stretch or daily meditation

Define your workspace

Set up a dedicated workspace in your home to reduce distractions and maintain work-life balance. You may have an actual home office or perhaps you are carving out space at the kitchen table, in a corner of your living room or down in your basement. Wherever your space is, keep that area tidy and clean. Check the strength of your WiFi or broadband. How is your lighting? Try

to find areas with natural light and low noise and be mindful of your surrounding for virtual meetings - you don’t want your laundry drying in the background! Your bed may look like a tempting office space, but resist the urge work where you sleep as the quality of both (not to mention your posture), will suffer.

Equipment

Consult with IT or HR to understand what equipment, cables, software or hardware you will need to work from home, such as a laptop, monitor, email and VPN access, security tokens, permission to access necessary files.

Dress the part

A part of maintaining your normal morning routine means being presentable. Rather than sitting at your desk in your pajamas, dress as if you are going into work. Selecting clothing that

is appropriate for the office keeps you connected to your work and helps create boundaries between time spent working and time spent relaxing at home.

Hold yourself accountable

Create a task list when you start your day to keep you focused and to prioritize the things you need to get done. Refer to your list throughout the day and cross off items as you complete them. It may help to talk through your to-do list or share your goals for the day with your supervisor or a colleague over video chat when you start the day.

Communication is key

When used correctly, technology can help us to collaborate and stay connected. Use the communication tools you have at hand (email, online collaboration tools, and your wellbeing platform) to stay connected and

share regular updates. When you attend video conferences, enable video and show your smiling face. This demonstrates you are present and engaged and creates more natural conversation with your colleagues. Some video conferencing tools even allow you to customize your background, so have some fun! As you consider which tools can help you be most productive, remember that a simple phone call may be the best - and fastest - way to communicate and get the information you need.

Make time to socialize

Don't underestimate the importance of chatting with your coworkers.

Research shows even small increases in social bonds can boost employee productivity. Try out a walking meeting or share healthy lunch recipes with your team to keep it fun. Make sure you build in those moments for meaningful exchanges on a daily basis. Launching healthy habit challenges or step-offs with your coworkers is a great way to maintain connection in a fun way.

Schedule time for breaks

Everyone responds to working from home differently. Some people will naturally overwork themselves, while others will struggle to stay on task throughout the day. This is why scheduling breaks is so important for

your physical and mental health. Set a regular reminder on your phone or use your wellbeing platform to hold yourself accountable in practicing all of your daily healthy habits. Take a walk outside, meditate, listen to your favorite podcast.

Unplug at the end of the day

Set a time to leave the office and maintain that routine each day. Close your laptop, turn off your computer or other devices, and step away from your workspace when the day is over. Work-life balance is important to staying productive, reducing burnout, and returning to work refreshed and ready to tackle another day.



COVID-19 Disruptions: We're All In This Together

For parents and caregivers, COVID-19 adds a whole new dimension of disruption and anxiety. With most schools, colleges and universities not likely to be back in session before May, if at all, parents and caregivers are feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and mentally spent. They're working from home and now jockeying with spouses, partners and kids for a quiet workspace where they can be productive. Then, they must figure out how to divide their attention and energy between taking care of their families

and their work. With social distancing recommendations and shelter-in-place mandates, playdates and daycare are no longer options. High school and college kids don't need a 24/7 babysitter, but they do need attention, especially now. They, too, are facing uncertainty and disruption on a scale that they've never experienced before. This is unsettling for everyone.

We must remember that we are all in this together and we are all impacted. And, we all have a responsibility to safeguard public health. That will require us to

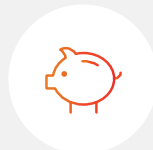
one-another, especially co-workers who have caregiving responsibilities, through proactive empathy and patience. Ask coworkers how they are feeling - if you are able to help, offer to do so. Employers should consider accommodating flexible working hours so that employees can better balance their work/life responsibilities. In addition to actively promoting EAP programs available to employees, explore benefits that may relieve the burden on parents and caregivers:



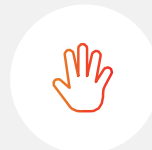
Coaching services and support to help relieve stress and anxiety



Digital wellbeing programs that focus on improving sleep quality, mental health resilience and mindfulness



Financial wellbeing education and programs



Back-up care services



Meal preparation and delivery services