MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS TIPS FOR QUARANTINE

1. Stick to a routine. Go to sleep and wake up at a reasonable time, write
a schedule that is varied and includes time for work as well as self-care.

2. Dress for the social life you want, not the social life you have. Get
showered and dressed in comfortable clothes, wash your face, brush your
teeth. Take the time to do a bath or a facial. Put on some bright colors.
It is amazing how our dress can impact our mood.

3. Get out at least once a day, for at least thirty minutes. If you are
concerned of contact, try first thing in the morning, or later in the
evening, and try less traveled streets and avenues. If you are high risk or
living with those who are high risk, open the windows and blast the fan. It
is amazing how much fresh air can do for spirits.

4. Find some time to move each day, again daily for at least thirty
minutes. If you don’t feel comfortable going outside, there are many
YouTube videos that offer free movement classes, and if all else fails,
turn on the music and have a dance party!

5. Reach out to others, you guessed it, at least once daily for thirty
minutes. Try to do FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, texting—connect with other
people to seek and provide support. Don’t forget to do this for your
children as well. Set up virtual playdates with friends daily via FaceTime,
Facebook Messenger Kids, Zoom, etc—your kids miss their friends, too!

6. Stay hydrated and eat well. This one may seem obvious, but stress and
eating often don’t mix well, and we find ourselves over-indulging,
forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat some good
and nutritious foods, and challenge yourself to learn how to cook something
new!

7. Develop a self-care toolkit. This can look different for everyone. A lot
of successful self-care strategies involve a sensory component (seven
senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement) and
proprioceptive (comforting pressure). An idea for each: a soft blanket or
stuffed animal, a hot chocolate, photos of vacations, comforting music,
lavender or eucalyptus oil, a small swing or rocking chair, a weighted
blanket. A journal, an inspirational book, or a mandala coloring book is
wonderful, bubbles to blow or blowing watercolor on paper through a straw
are visually appealing as well as work on controlled breath. Mint gum,
Listerine strips, ginger ale, frozen Starburst, ice packs, and cold are
also good for anxiety regulation. For children, it is great to help them
create a self-regulation comfort box (often a shoe-box or bin they can
decorate) that they can use on the ready for first-aid when overwhelmed.

8. Spend extra time playing with children. Children will rarely communicate
how they are feeling, but will often make a bid for attention and
communication through play. Don’t be surprised to see therapeutic themes of
illness, doctor visits, and isolation play through. Understand that play is
cathartic and helpful for children—it is how they process their world and
problem solve, and there’s a lot they are seeing and experiencing in the
now.

9. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and a wide berth. 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. It is important to 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.

10. Everyone find their own retreat space. Space is at a premium,
particularly with city living. It is important that people think through
their own separate space for work and for relaxation. For children, help
them identify a place where they can go to retreat when stressed. You can
make this place cozy by using blankets, pillows, cushions, scarves,
beanbags, tents, and “forts”. It is good to know that even when we are on
top of each other, we have our own special place to go to be alone.

11. Expect behavioral issues in children, and respond gently. 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 increased anxiety, worries and fears, nightmares,
difficulty separating or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Do not
introduce major behavioral plans or consequences at this time—hold stable
and focus on emotional connection.

12. Focus on safety and attachment. We are going to be living for a bit
with the unprecedented demand of meeting all work deadlines, homeschooling
children, running a sterile household, and making a whole lot of
entertainment in confinement. We can get wrapped up in meeting expectations
in all domains, but we must remember that these are scary and unpredictable
times for children. Focus on strengthening the connection through time
spent following their lead, through physical touch, through play, through
therapeutic books, and via verbal reassurances that you will be there for
them in this time.

13. Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance. This idea is
connected with #12. We are doing too many things in this moment, under fear
and stress. This does not make a formula for excellence. Instead, 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 for this, and we are all truly doing the best we can in an
impossible situation.

14. Limit social media and COVID conversation, especially around children.
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, limit it to a few times a day, and set a time limit for
yourself on how much you consume (again 30 minutes tops, 2-3 times daily).
Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot from children—they see
and hear everything, and can become very frightened by what they hear.

15. 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 a ton of stories of people sacrificing, donating, and
supporting one another in miraculous ways. It is important to
counter-balance the heavy information with the hopeful information.

16. Help others. Find ways, big and small, to give back to others. Support
restaurants, offer to grocery shop, check in with elderly neighbors, write
psychological wellness tips for others—helping others gives us a sense of
agency when things seem out of control.

17. Find something you can control, and control the heck out of it. In
moments of big uncertainty and overwhelm, control your little corner of the
world. Organize your bookshelf, purge your closet, put together that
furniture, group your toys. It helps to anchor and ground us when the
bigger things are chaotic.

18. Find a long-term project to dive into. Now is the time to learn how to
play the keyboard, put together a huge jigsaw puzzle, start a 15 hour game
of Risk, paint a picture, read the Harry Potter series, binge watch an
8-season show, crochet a blanket, solve a Rubix cube, or develop a new town
in Animal Crossing. Find something that will keep you busy, distracted, and
engaged to take breaks from what is going on in the outside world.

19. Engage in repetitive movements and left-right movements. Research has
shown that repetitive movement (knitting, coloring, painting, clay
sculpting, jump roping etc) especially left-right movement (running,
drumming, skating, hopping) can be effective at self-soothing and
maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress.

20. Find an expressive art and go for it. Our emotional brain is very
receptive to the creative arts, and it is a direct portal for release of
feeling. Find something that is creative (sculpting, drawing, dancing,
music, singing, playing) and give it your all. See how relieved you can
feel. It is a very effective way of helping kids to emote and communicate
as well!

21. Find lightness and humor in each day. There is a lot to be worried
about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something
funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny
movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day.

22. Reach out for help—your team is there for you. If you have a therapist
or psychiatrist, they are available to you, even at a distance. Keep up
your medications and your therapy sessions the best you can. If you are
having difficulty coping, seek out help for the first time. There are
mental health people on the ready to help you through this crisis. Your
children’s teachers and related service providers will do anything within
their power to help, especially for those parents tasked with the difficult
task of being a whole treatment team to their child with special
challenges. Seek support groups of fellow home-schoolers, parents, and
neighbors to feel connected. There is help and support out there, any time
of the day—although we are physically distant, we can always connect
virtually.

23. “Chunk” your quarantine, 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. Often, when I work with patients who have anxiety around
overwhelming issues, I suggest that they engage in a strategy called
“chunking”—focusing on whatever bite-sized piece of a challenge that feels
manageable. Whether that be 5 minutes, a day, or a week at a time—find what
feels doable for you, and set a time stamp for how far ahead in the future
you will let yourself worry. Take each chunk one at a time, and move
through stress in pieces.

24. Remind yourself daily that this is temporary. It seems in the midst of
this quarantine that it will never end. It is terrifying to think of the
road stretching ahead of us. Please take time to remind yourself that
although this is very scary and difficult, and will go on for an
undetermined amount of time, it is a season of life and it will pass. We
will return to feeing free, safe, busy, and connected in the days ahead.

25. Find the lesson. This whole crisis can seem sad, senseless, and at
times, avoidable. When psychologists work with trauma, a key feature to
helping someone work through said trauma is to help them find their agency,
the potential positive outcomes they can effect, the meaning and
construction that can come out of destruction. What can each of us learn
here, in big and small ways, from this crisis? What needs to change in
ourselves, our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world?