

Tips To Stay Emotionally Well During Self-Isolation

My name is Juliette Young I am a Volunteer at The Mulberry Centre. I am a counsellor and psychotherapist who works from the Human Givens approach to emotional health and well-being (see link at end of article) What this basically means is that we look at a person's emotional needs, and identify which ones are not well met, or missing entirely, and then redress that balance by helping them to recognise and use their own resources. So I thought I would focus on some of those needs in this article; ones which will be seriously challenged by the current situation, and offer tips to address them.

The Need For Control and Autonomy

We all need to have a sense of control about what happens to us and around us. But in this very uncertain and worrying time, it is harder than ever to achieve this. It's helpful to make a distinction between what we can and can't control, so start by making two lists:

Things you can't control (and therefore can let go of) could include: how other people behave or react, how long the situation will last, how many toilet rolls are in the shops, whether a cure or vaccine will be found, the daily news.

Things you can control (and therefore can decide to focus on) could include: your own social distancing and hygiene measures, reaching out to others with kindness and compassion (by phone or internet), limiting use of social media and exposure to news bulletins. And finding interesting or enjoyable things you can do at home (of which more later).

The Need For Security

This is being severely challenged right now, as none of us knows what is coming. This of course links to control, so rather than letting our imaginations run wild with 'what ifs?' try to focus on the here and now. Doing a gratitude list can work well in this instance. Make a list of everything you have to be grateful for (no matter how small) and try to get into the habit of doing it on a daily basis. For example, you may be stuck at home, but you can be grateful that you *have* a home. Maybe you have friends and/or family who are looking out for you and pulling together. Maybe you can hear birdsong for the first time in years because there are far fewer planes and fewer cars on the road. The more we look for things to be grateful for, the more we will find, and it also retrains the brain to focus on what is going right, rather than what is going wrong.



The Need For Friendship and Connection To Our Wider Community

This is clearly a big challenge now, but many people are setting up local WhatsApp or FaceBook groups to stay connected with friends and neighbours. Those who are well are offering to do shopping or collect prescriptions, and many are offering phone calls to keep people's spirits up. In my street we are lucky enough to have front gardens, and lots of us came out at a pre-arranged time with our drink of choice last week, and chatted across fences and across the road (which is now almost empty of any traffic – another bonus of the virus). It's a good idea to make a promise to yourself that you will connect with at least one other person every day. This is even more important if you are isolating on your own. If you don't feel like doing it, that is even more reason to do so. Make a plan with one or more friends so that you can all do this for each other. Skype and Zoom are good ways to connect with more than one person at a time if you have internet access. Zoom is free for up to 45 minutes for group gatherings, and free indefinitely if it's one-to-one.

So, back to ideas for what you can do whilst stuck at home. Firstly I would say that unless you are too ill to leave your bed, then it's a really good idea to get a routine into your day, by getting up at the same time each day, and getting washed and dressed. Do not be tempted to spend all day in your nightwear. This is also the ideal time to reset your body clock if you have been in the habit of working long days and economising on your sleep. So try and avoid staying up late at night and lying in late in the morning, as this will very soon adversely effect your mood.

- 1) There is a direct connection between our hands and our brains, so doing something creative with our hands has an immediate feel-good effect on our minds. Do you have a craft that you used to do and can take up again, or something that you've always wanted to try? Adult colouring-in books, origami, knitting, embroidery, dressmaking, drawing (try doing a still-life), painting. There are numerous instruction videos on Youtube, so do make use of that.
- 2) Music is great for lifting your spirits in so many ways, whether it's listening to it, playing an instrument, singing or dancing to it. Yes, seriously, dancing! Put on your favourite music and just dance. Not only is this good exercise, but it has a really beneficial effect on our minds too.



The Need For Friendship and Connection To Our Wider Community cont.

- 3) Baking and cooking. With many of us not able to get our usual ingredients, it's a good time to improvise. It's also a great thing to do with kids, if you are stuck at home with them. The TV programme Ready Steady Cook is good inspiration for making up recipes, and a new show on Channel 4 with Jamie Oliver has just started, specially made for these times called 'Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On' where he makes recipes from things we may already have in our store cupboard them.
- 4) If you are lucky enough to have a garden, then this is the perfect time to get out there and start getting it ready for the summer. Get your hands into the soil, prune, weed and plant if you have any cuttings or seeds. If you don't have a garden, maybe you have a window box?
- 5) Exercise; you can dance, as mentioned above, or follow any one of numerous exercise, Pilates or yoga routines on Youtube. This is really important, both for physical and emotional wellness.
- 6) Reading. Maybe you have been too busy to read in recent years, or maybe it was never your thing. But books are a wonderful way to escape reality and enter a different world. With a good book, you can go anywhere! Re-reading old books that you have loved is also very comforting. Libraries are now sadly closed, but maybe you could do book-swaps with your neighbours (posted through letterboxes or left on the doorstep). This is another good way to connect with friends and neighbours; if you have read the same book, then you can talk about it (which would make a change from just talking about the virus!) An alternative to reading is an audio book if you have access to the internet.
- 7) Finally, meditation and guided relaxation. You may never have thought of doing this before, but it is the best way to maintain emotional health and a sense of wellbeing in such troubling times. It's quite possible that your sleep is being affected, so this is also a good way to redress that balance. There are numerous guided meditations on Youtube, ranging in length from 3 minutes to 12 hours! So have a little browse and find one or two that you like, and put aside the time for that every day, preferably at the same time.



So to sum up, I would say that along with all the official health guidance, which we should all be following, it is just as important to pay attention to our emotional and mental health. Having a daily routine, doing a gratitude list, putting aside some time for relaxation, and staying connected to friends and family are probably the four most important things that you can do to help ensure this. Good luck and stay safe.

If you would like to know more about the Human Givens approach, and our emotional needs, see here:

<https://www.hgi.org.uk/human-givens/introduction/what-are-human-givens>



