

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

SURVIVING A PANDEMIC DURING THE WINTER

THINGS TO KNOW

1. ***Surviving a pandemic is really hard work.*** Reminding yourself of this helps to create the emotional space you need to be more comfortable when you don't have the answers or you make a mistake.
2. ***Surviving a pandemic can be fatiguing.*** Handling extended anxiety and being faced with an increased number of decisions to make can result in tired brains and tired bodies.
3. ***You may be experiencing secondary trauma.*** We are affected by hearing other people's trauma stories, including news stories, which contributes to a sense of fatigue, burn-out, low motivation, and increased irritability.
4. ***Pandemics are long affairs.*** Long games require strategies that are flexible and responsive. If what you are doing to cope is no longer working, try switching things up.

Building Resilience

FIRST, PUT ON YOUR OXYGEN MASK, THEN HELP OTHERS

The idea that you can't help someone else unless you first take care of yourself has never felt more true. The persistent nature of surviving a pandemic can prove notably tiring. This is *Pandemic Fatigue*. If you are tired, you have less capacity to be gracious with yourself, let alone anyone else.

TRY THIS...

- Take more frequent breaks, even small ones.
- Do things more often that make you feel rested.
- Let the smaller things go - know when to pick your battles.

But most importantly, when you are too drained to do more than take care of your immediate needs, let that be enough.

NOTICE YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE

What you tell yourself really matters. In psychological terms, this behavior is called the *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*. To avoid this when you're struggling or tired, ask yourself: *what am I telling myself about this situation I am in?* You can also do this for your children when you notice that their motivation is low. This process of monitoring your internal dialogue helps to build resilience and motivation.

TRY THIS...

- Remind yourself you can do hard things and you can do them well.
- Give yourself permission to make mistakes and not dwell on them.
- Practice the belief that you can have unpleasant feelings and still be okay.

Sometimes, it's okay to not be okay. In other words, negative feelings are not bad. They are informative and meant to help us create change.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to what is going on in the present moment and intentionally observing these moments without judgment and with self-compassion. Think of it as observing your experience with acceptance.

When you're stressed and anxious, you can get stuck over-thinking about the past or trying to predict the future in an attempt to control your discomfort. Your stress and anxiety go down if you can pull out of this focus on the past or future and notice the present moment, even if you're feeling discomfort at that moment.

TRY THIS...

- Pause to notice where you're at a given moment.
- Take a minute to observe how you are feeling without judgment and with self-compassion.
- Notice when you're dwelling on the future or past and return your focus to something in the present, using your senses often helps.

CELEBRATE THE SMALL STUFF AND CELEBRATE MORE FREQUENTLY.

Celebrating helps us to strengthen our connections, stay in the moment, and bring us out of our heads. You can create your own celebrations. Celebrations are also a fun way to practice mindfulness, and right now mindfulness and fun are key.

TRY THIS...

- Pick a night each week to stay up late watching movies with your partner or kids.
- Have monthly living room campouts with dish-free foods that require minimal clean-up.
- Celebrate the winter solstice with candles and dancing.
- Celebrate half-birthdays, quarter-birthdays, finished books, sunny days, you name it.
- Get dressed up for dinner, or spend the day in your PJs.
- AND, If you are living on your own, try turning your ZOOM meet-ups into dinner dates, cocktail hours, or movie nights....

PRACTICE SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS

Doing things for others makes us feel good. We could all use more of that right now and you don't have to spend money to make someone feel good.

TRY THIS...

- Bring in your neighbor's garbage bin, rake their leaves, or shovel their sidewalk.
- Leave sticky-note compliments on the bathroom mirror or the refrigerator door for housemates or family members.
- Offer to do a family member's portion of the clean-up or someone's chore for the day.
- Cook someone their favorite meal as a surprise.
- Drop off a note on a friend's porch, take a selfie, then text them the image as you drive away....

REDUCE YOUR PASSIVE SCREEN-TIME

Scrolling through endless TikTok or Instagram videos may take our minds off things, but it does not help us to feel more connected. If you need screen-time, try to make it more interactive.

TRY THIS...

- Post a story, comment on someone else's, or send a message or a text.
- Postpone screen-time for 5-10 minutes while distracting yourself with something else. If that works, repeat as many times as you can.
- Rest your eyes several times each day.

MOVE YOUR BODY

Research shows that exercise helps our mental health by reducing anxiety and depression and by improving self-esteem. Moving our bodies in this way also helps us to think and problem solve. If exercise involves getting outside, exposure to UV light and fresh air, even for a short time can lift your spirits and soothe your central nervous system.

If exercise is your thing

TRY THIS...

- Exercise for at least 20 minutes a day, 3-4 times a week.
- Go for a walk when you can.

If exercise is not your thing... that's ok too!

TRY THIS...

- Take a break for 5-10 minutes every few hours, walking around or stretching.
- Sit on your front or back porch. In other words, get outside and breathe the fresh air.
- Dance to your favorite music.

SET SMALL GOALS AND BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Success breeds more success. So, if you're trying to make a change in your life, taking it slowly and being generous with yourself when you slip up or struggle increases the likelihood of success. When you get mad at yourself for failing, you risk feeling stuck where you are. (Think: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy)

TRY THIS...

- Set small, attainable goals to work your way up to whatever change you want to see.
- Take deep breaths and a moment to reflect on what went wrong.
- Notice your self-talk and set a new intention for the next day.
- Celebrate the small wins along the way!

SURVIVING A PANDEMIC IS REALLY HARD WORK.

HOW WE TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS MATTERS.



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