

# Creative Coping Strategies for the COVID-19 Pandemic (a work in progress)

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- **Basics! Take care of your health:** Be sure to rest, get some exercise, and eat as well as you can.
  - Do 15-20 min of exercise a day—walk in place, do an online yoga or aerobic video, walk up and down stairs, lift up soup cans, etc. Stretch,
  - Try to eat well.
    - Eat foods that nourish you and help you eliminate toxins.
    - Try not to indulge in junk food or drink too much alcohol even if the stress of this situation makes it tempting.
    - Hydrate! Drink lots of healthy fluids.
  - Create and stick to a schedule for meals.
  - Use this as an opportunity to experiment with healthy lifestyle changes.
  - Avoid making significant lifestyle changes if it will be too stressful.
- **Create rituals:** To instill some normalcy and regularity.
  - When you are doing cleaning/sterilizing rituals (washing your hands, cleaning clothes, sterilizing groceries) add something that is pleasant or meaningful to that process—sing a line from an uplifting song, say a prayer, light a candle, do a little dance.
  - Use affirmations such as “I am divinely protected” or “I care for myself and I care for others”.
- **Consider your environment:** Hang photos, drawings, and images that make you feel better in areas that you are regularly occupying. Use the power of what you see to lift your spirits.
- **Keep grounded:** Take note of your feet and where you are seated or standing. Wiggle your toes. If you are able to, imagine your feet connected as if they had roots to the ground or that you have an anchor below you that is keeping you steady.
- **Grounding objects:** Carry some sort of small positive object (worry stone, lucky coin) or wear a special piece of jewelry and occasionally hold it for grounding.
- **Mindfulness:** If it feels appropriate and is not anxiety provoking, do a quick scan of yourself and notice what you are physically and emotionally experiencing and what your thoughts are. Don’t try to change these, just notice them.
- **Meditate:** If your mind is racing too much to meditate, try a guided meditation or visualization.
- **Focus on your breathing:** Do structured breathing exercises. If you need some help, see below for examples \*.
- **Soothing activities:** If none of those work, do something soothing and repetitive like coloring, ironing, gardening, knitting, mowing the lawn, cooking, woodworking, or tinkering of some sort. ([Here a link to a free coloring sheet](#) illustrated by Rebecca).
- **Positive distractions:** If you are feeling anxious and agitated, see if you can shift your focus to something that makes you feel calm/connected/grounded. Use other positive distractions either in your environment or through your smart devices/computers:
  - Music
  - Reading
  - Artmaking
  - Exercising/Stretching
  - Taking a walk, being in nature
  - Pets

- Games/Puzzles
- Humor—watch funny videos, comedians, share comic strips and funny memes
- Laughter therapy—laugh loudly and audibly it increases endorphins and boost immunity
- Tape/hang photos in your environment that make you happy and inspire you (people, animals, beautiful places)
- Learn a new skill
- Pull out old skills/hobbies
- Use facetime or social media to connect with current friends and make new ones
- **Stay connected to seniors or other people who are stuck in lock-down:** (this would be people who have some access to technology but may not be familiar with social media).
  - Ritualize interactions with them so they have something dependable to rely on:
    - Have regular, quick check-in calls. Facetime if possible.
    - Send them a daily photo through text.
    - Send an inspiring quote.
    - Send videos of you, your pets, kids, your environment, etc.
    - If they are able to, have them send the same back to you.
- **Use your smart devices wisely:** Although they can help us connect, they can also be a rabbit hole of anxiety. This is especially true now because, although thankfully there are many online resources and community exchanges that are generously being provided; they can be overwhelming. Be intentional about stepping into and stepping away from your devices.
- **Slogans:** Use sayings that are grounding such as slogans from 12 Step recovery: Progress not Perfection, Easy Does It, First Things First, This Too shall Pass, One Day at a Time (you can even think, 'One minute at a time'). Or use the classic Serenity Prayer:

*Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.*

-Reinhold Niebuhr

- **Create certainty:** Although there is so much that we don't know right now, there are things that we *do* know. Recognize what you are able to change and what you can't and apply your efforts to those things that you *can* change (repeat that Serenity Prayer again).
- **Manage Expectations:** You may suddenly feel pressure to finish to-do lists, start new projects, or chase opportunities being offered online. Reduce your expectations, know your limits, keep it simple.
- **Create Structure:** Each day, prioritize and schedule what you need to do. Be sure to include self-care, enjoyable and/or soothing activities.
- **Express the Stress:**
  - If you are feeling overwhelmed, irritated, anxious, afraid, confused, numb, that needs to be expressed. Get that out—release the stress through expressive writing, artwork, singing, etc. Those feelings need to be acknowledged and processed.
- **Shifting Focus and Taking Action:** Make decisions based on what you *do* know and what you can usefully do to help yourself and others in the moment.
  - Determine your core values and what impact you want to have and then try to make decisions based upon those.
  - If there is no clear course of action, make a decision even if it's not ideal and stick with that for a set amount of time.

- Reassess that decision at regular intervals.
- Change course if needed.
- Adopt a growth mindset; i.e., because we may not exactly know how to proceed, we will make mistakes and that has to be OK.
- **Meaning:** What do these events and this time in history mean to *you*?
  - In this moment
  - In the long run
  - Find your center, remember who you are. If you don't know, find out.
  - Use this as an opportunity to discover more about yourself.
  - Identify what keeps you strong and able to persist. Use those strengths more.
  - Journal or do artwork about how you are responding to this moment.
  - Find the silver lining. How can this be an opportunity for us to improve our health, our communities, and our world? Journal or do artwork about that too.
- **Get creative:** Tap into the power of your mind to respond creatively to this challenging situation.
  - If you need to warm yourself up, here are ways to get the creative process going:
    - Doodle—it warms up the right side of the brain.
    - Spill writing: Write anything that's on your mind for 3 minutes without pausing (if you don't know what to write, start with "I don't know what to write", "this is stupid" "nothing comes to mind" etc.).
    - Write with your non-dominant hand about what you are experiencing.
    - Make a gratitude list.
    - Pause and observe—find 10 things in your immediate environment that you never really noticed before.
  - Check out this link [250 ways to get creative](#).
  - Find ways to create in community. Invite neighbors to do art in your neighborhood, to sing together at a particular time, to clap or wave at the same time, etc.
  - Share your creativity online. Artists, musicians, crafters, are all recording or hosting live events for people to enjoy. Contribute to this amazing pool.
  - Use your creativity to help solve some of the problems this "novel" situation is posing.
  - Notice the creativity and ingenuity that is emerging in others as in the face of this very real threat and the changes it is bringing to our lives.
- **Get support:**
  - Connect with friends and family.
  - Tap into or create a support group.
  - Find professional help. Thankfully, many therapists are able to work online now because of this health crisis so it can be easier to access those resources.
  - Help others, it makes us feel less lonely, more connected and better about ourselves.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- [Information on COVID 19 from the CDC](#)
- [Information about stress and trauma as a result of COVID 19](#)
- [250 ways to get creative with your family sane during the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
- ["Love around the World" free coloring sheet](#)
- [Creative Wellbeing Workshops resources for stress management and creativity](#)
- [Health consciousness in a time of epidemics](#)
- [Chopra Meditation Center](#)
- [Mayo Clinic stress relief from laughter](#)
- [Andrew Weil's breathing techniques for stress](#)

### \* Breathing Exercises

- Integrative Medical Practitioner Andrew Weil's Breathing exercises:
  - Relaxing 4:7:8
    - Inhale for a count of 4
    - Hold for a count of 7
    - Exhale for a count of 8
    - Repeat 4-8 times
  - Stabilizing 4:4:4:4 (can also do for a count of 2 each)
    - Inhale for a count of 4
    - Hold for a count of 4
    - Exhale for a count of 4
    - Hold for a count of 4
    - Repeat 4- 8 times
  
- Ayurvedic Practitioner John Douillard's Nostril breathing exercise energizes and builds lung strength. (This requires touching the face so should only be done if your hands are properly sanitized/use gloves if you need them and have them available. Wash hands after engaging in the exercise).
  - Sit up straight or stand firmly.
  - Pinch your nose lightly on both sides of the nostrils with thumb and index finger so nostril passages are lightly obstructed.
  - Breathe in sharply and quickly through nostrils so the abdomen tightens and lifts up.
  - Exhale through nostrils (still lightly pinched).
  - Repeat 10 times.
  - After last exhalation hold your breath until you need to inhale again.
  - Repeat 5 times.