

The world is grappling with an issue of enormous scale and human impact, and my heart goes out to all who have been affected by the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID – 19). I have the utmost respect and admiration for those of you who are on the frontline, battling every day, every hour to take care of those who are at high risk for the virus. Your dedication and commitment to taking care of others is remarkable and your service is greatly appreciated.

During this time, we may experience emotional ups and downs and twists and turns of our feelings. This rollercoaster of emotions can be difficult to deal with. Anxiety, depression, anger and fear can leave us on edge, stressed out and emotionally exhausted. So how do we deal with all of these heightened emotions? I don't have all the answers, but I have compiled a list of suggestions that may help.

- Try to get plenty of rest and eat well.
- Stay as close to your normal routine as possible. It will help keep you grounded.
- Get plenty of exercise. Go for walks by yourself to get some solitude or with the family for some good bonding time. Remember to practice social distancing when you see someone else, but remember to say hi and exchange a few kind words. Pull those bikes out and go for a bike ride. Utilize exercise, workout and yoga videos or apps
- Relaxation and meditation videos or apps can provide some good stress reduction
- Inspirational or spiritual daily messages can help reduce anxiety
- Journal, journal and journal some more – writing things down and getting them out onto paper can be very therapeutic. My recommendation is to handwrite, but writing in any manner will help
- Write a story by yourself or as a family. If you write as a family someone starts by writing three sentences and then passes it to the next who writes three sentences and by the end you have a pretty amusing story to read.
- Draw or color in a kid or adult coloring book. It is very therapeutic!
- Talk with others, rather than keep your feeling in- it's OK to say that this is hard and how you feel.
- Stay informed but it is not necessary to watch the news several times a day. If you have kids keep them away from the news, but explain to them in an age appropriate manner about what is going on.
- Take advantage of the actors/actresses, musicians and comedians that are doing free shows and concerts on TV or youtube
- Pull out old family movies and watch them or watch Christmas or Halloween movies
- Now is a good time for family games and puzzles

- Sudoku, word searches and crossword puzzles can be soothing and can refocus your thoughts
- Turn up the tunes! Listen to music and sing along or dance along. Music lightens people's spirits
- Time to reacquaint yourself with some of your long lost hobbies and crafts or start a new one.
- Do your spring-cleaning both inside and in your yard and garden. Clean out your closets and drawers. Pack a donation box or bag, as it always feels good to help others.
- Plan a trip that you may or may not take. Be sure to include where you will go, what you will do. Explore sights to see and different cultural aspects of your destination.
- Find a new recipe or pull out an old favorite to make. Play "Chopped" by seeing what you have in the house and how you can create a meal from those items.
- Bake for others at work or donate baked goods to your local first responders
- Pet your dog, cat or other pet (except fish) as this has been shown to reduce people's blood pressure and has a calming effect.
- Stay socially connected to others by face timing, skype or zoom. Have a party through zoom or other social media options.
- Seek out those who will be cheerleaders for you and support you when you need support
- Reach to people in your life who you have not spoken to in a while
- Collect feel good stories from others. Ask them what they have been doing during this time of shelter in place to entertain themselves. Share your ideas with them.
- Ask your loved ones for what you need. They can't read your mind so let them know if you need a hug or you need to be left alone.
- Seek out professional help. Most mental health providers are available through telehealth options. All insurance companies have approved payment of telehealth sessions at this time.

Remember that you are not alone. Together we can make it through this. I leave you with well wishes for each and every one of you that is on the frontline and your families. Stay strong and stay safe and remember to take of yourself while you take care of others.

Diane M. Ross, MS, LCPC

Diane can be reached at the Centre for Professional Counseling. 847-885-7790