

10 ways to deal with social distancing during COVID-19:

COVID-19 has ripped us off of our sense of control. At first, it was a far away reality that only impacted China, and then it came to Europe, and now it's in the USA, taking lives and has changed every aspect of our day to day lives. Life has stopped as we know it. With such a dramatic change, a lot of us are experiencing a variety of reactions ranging from denial to anxiety, pessimism, panic, and even plans for social unrest. Between denial and panic, there is a space where we can handle this global and yet very individual crisis with wisdom. We focus on what we can control and prepare ourselves and yet remain positive.

In times like this, our need to stay healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually is more important than ever. So what can we do during COVID-19 to stay strong inside and out? What can you control when you can't control anything? What does your present look like when you can't see your future at all? Here is a list of how I am dealing with COVID-19 and guiding my clients to deal with it.

1. Have a routine/structure: Structure works best in times of uncertainty. Come up with a daily routine that is predictable. Get up at the same time, go to bed at the same time, schedule a work out in, and schedule your meals. Having a little calendar of events will give you a sense of normalcy and predictability that might be comforting. For example, I have asked my clients (especially those whose jobs are indefinitely on hold) to create a google calendar with 'appointments' for specific activities just as breakfast, baking, 100 push ups etc.

2. Create something new: Have you always wanted to bake your own bread? Try a new recipe for a Thai curry? Do a drawing? This is the time to try that something new. The feeling of accomplishment that comes with creating something new can be powerful and healing. It might also give you a sense of control.

3. Learn a new skill. Similarly to creating something new, learning a new skill can also help boost your day to day. Have you always wanted to learn Spanish, or how to play guitar? Well, now that you have more time in your hands, put that time to use in learning something new. This would help you stimulate parts of your brain that you normally don't use and will give you a feeling of accomplishment.

3. Pets can help: If you have a pet, you are already ahead of the game. In times like these, pets can be of great help in providing distraction and comfort. I have heard people renting their dogs out, or folks adopting or fostering dogs at shelters. Pets come with responsibilities that might help you with your daily routine. Taking them out for a walk or feeding them 3 times a day might help you structure your day in an effective and predictable way.

4. Help others in less fortunate situations: If you are one of the fortunate ones, spread the love. Find ways to help your community. This could be done by offering your time, your money, your services... Health care professionals need medical

supplies. If you have extra masks, donate them to your local hospital. We need to protect our medical professionals. Depending on the social cause you feel strongly about, you can also donate to No Kid Hungry, One fair Wage Emergency Fund, Meals on Wheels, Red Cross etc. In addition, continue supporting your local small businesses by ordering take out food once a week. We need people with big hearts in this global epidemic.

5. Make time for your loved ones: Technology affords us the ability to connect and socialize. Facebook, whatsapp, snapchat, you name it, we have ways to connect with our friends and families that we can't otherwise be with. Schedule dinner or lunch "dates" with your friends where you share a meal virtually. Have conference calls with your girlfriends and share a glass of wine, cook together, support each other.

6. Take a walk/be in nature: Although this sounds counterintuitive in the locked down world we live in, it's possible to go out in nature and still keep your distance. Nature shows us how things flow and allow us to connect spiritually with the higher force. If you don't want you to go out in the nature, you can also attend to the "nature" in your house. If you have flowers, or plants, attending to them can help you reduce stress and anxiety. If all fails, look at nature pictures online including pictures of where you want to go on your next trip, a place you have always wanted to explore might keep you encouraged and inspired.

7. Write it out: Writing your feelings helps getting them out and shrinking them. Write about your worries, your fears, what you are looking forward to, your dreams, your anxieties. Write a letter to your future self after corona (Dear post-Corona RakeL, when you read this, you). Write about some of the revelations you are having about your life, your values, take inventory of your lessons learned, and overall your inner world. Externalizing will take the weight off of you.

8. Humor: Smile is the best medicine they say. In times where we are bombarded with negative news left and right, humor can be the exactly what we need. Humor doesn't mean taking things lightly. Humor, when used in moderation is a healthy coping mechanism that has physical benefits including better circulation, lungs and muscles. Overall, humor helps people deal with pain and adversity. Watch a funny movie, or follow funny Instagram sites like @commentsbycelebs, @adam.the.creator provide daily memes that make us smile at the tragedy that we are all being hit by.

9. Gratitude list: An important way of dealing with uncertainty and the anxiety that pursues is to be present and mindful of things around us. A lot of people talk about being grateful for what we have such as health, wealth, families etc. But these big item things hardly ever help us be present in a meaningful way. When I think about gratitude I think about micro moments: I think about the spiciness of the Thai dish I had, or the breeze that I felt on my skin when I went for a run on the beach. Try to think about 5 very specific and detailed things that you were grateful for at the end of each day. This micro focus will help you be more mindful in the way you experience the next day.

10. Silverlining. Last but not least, I know it's such a therapist thing to say but... is there anything good that came out of the COVID pandemic for you or your family? For the first time in our life times, the world has finally slowed down. As tragic as this is, there is a serenity that comes with slowing down. We live our lives so attached to our schedules, our routines, our must-haves and go-tos that we take it all for granted. Now that there is no TP on the shelves, or chicken, or hand sanitizers, we will never take these for granted. We now know what it is what not to have, maybe for the first time which is so humbling. This slowing down also brought families together, forced us to share space with each other, negotiate bathrooms, tv screens, and computers. We are actually forced to get along because most of our diversions (i.e. malls, bars, movie theaters etc.) are taken away. We get to reevaluate our families, our relationships and hopefully take a hard look at ourselves. This is not just a time of break down but rather time of breakthrough. We will survive this and come out stronger.