

## Tips for Surviving Isolation

Many of us are in uncharted territory as we are spending most of our hours in our homes and away from typical routines and interaction. This can be stressful in unexpected ways. Here are some tips for minimizing your stress level and supporting your emotional health.

- **Keep as much of your regular routine as you can.** It's easy to move into "vacation mode" and let your regular habits go. But things as simple as your morning coffee or showering at a certain time can restore a sense of normalcy. For things you can't do while practicing social distancing, think about ways to replace them (e.g. substituting a walk for going to the gym).
- **Plan every day.** Even if your plan is to watch Netflix, set a time when you're going to do it and for how long. Days without structure can increase depression and anxiety
- **Talk to yourself reassuringly and without shame.** We are experiencing many visceral (gut level) cues that something bad is happening, and our nervous systems naturally respond by telling us to run, hide, or fight. Recognizing these responses can help you talk to yourself – literally. Try reassuring yourself as you would to a distressed child. "It makes sense that I'm scared (angry, jittery) right now. It seems like something dangerous is happening. But I am in control of how I respond. I am doing what I can to stay safe."
- **Engage in physical activity every day.** Even a few minutes of stretching or walking up and down stairs helps relieve stress.
- **Schedule virtual socializing.** Think about who you would encounter during the day if things were "normal." Then reach out to these folks and schedule time to have coffee or a meal virtually – you can talk while you eat or drink via video just as you would in person. Facetime, Google Hangouts, Skype and Facebook messenger all have video capability.
- **Regulate your news intake.** Pick a time of day when you will check the news (not right before bed!) and then turn it off the rest of the time. It's easy to get sucked in by the constant news updates. Trust that true emergency alerts will get to you on your phone, and let the constant checking go.
- **Focus on the immediate present as much as possible.** There is plenty to worry about if you focus on what is going to happen later. Turn your attention to what you are doing this very moment. Usually, any given moment in time is not bad – I am sitting in my chair, I am reading a book, I am talking to my kids. The future does not need your help, it will happen. Focus on the now.