

Tips for Emotional Health During Confinement

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Hanging in there!

We know it is hard! We are also confined these weeks living similar experiences of restriction and solitude...trying to make the best of it. We, like you, struggle sometimes with frustration and sadness. Hey! Psychologists cry too! ;-)

But here we are!! and we are in this together!!

Resilience is the capacity of being happy again after something difficult happens. Developing resilience is developing strength to deal with a painful situation, to adapt and maybe to bend but never to break down or quit.

We will walk through this day by day!!

This is why we wanted to share with you some ideas and strategies that, as a counselling team, we have been brainstorming and piloting with some students who reported that some of these ideas are actually working for them. We are also adding some more strategies from other sources and health experts. Not everything will work for each one of us but we hope that some of these ideas are somewhat useful to you.

We need to find our own formula!!!

Start every Morning by Making your Bed!

Establish a routine. Put your mind to work out. Remember that happiness is a mental discipline. We need to fight for happiness every day. Discipline is an important tool to encourage yourself to work on your responsibilities and that will make you feel strong, productive and proud.

We need to have fixed schedules with clear milestones (even if they feel small). Establish a wake up time, tidy-up your room and apartment, shower, prepare a healthy breakfast, dress as you are going out, study-work and attend your online classes, practice music, move-

exercise (push-ups, yoga, dance, workout, etc.), get out to buy something (groceries-meds), read, talk... bedtime.

We recommend you to establish a “to do list” and stick it in the wall or somewhere you can see it often. You can also feel good by crossing or checking out all the things that you have accomplished there. That will make you feel productive and proud.

Here is a video that can help you (with lots of discipline and determination) to motivate yourself to do these little routinely duties everyday:

If you want to change the world start by making your bed... and never ever give up!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sK3wJAxGfs>

Check On The Basics to Keep Healthy

Use your five fingers to check basic selfcare daily to boost your immune system, as follows:

Basic 1: Proper nutrition and don't forget about drinking enough water!

Basic 2. Sleep well (between 7-8 h.)

Basic 3. Exercise moderately

Basic 4. Socialize with the right people! And help others

Basic 5. Be Spiritual (pray, keep a balance, connect with the universe...there are many ways)

Use All Your Space

Even if you are living in a small apartment, try to use the entire space, each area to cover different needs. We recommend you, whenever possible the following strategies:

The Don'ts:

- Avoid eating (lunch, dinner, even snacks) in your room. Use the kitchen or living room for that as much as possible. This will force you to be disciplined in your nutrition and make you walk and change your mindset as you change the space.
- Avoid using your bed to think (overthink, worrying, etc.). Find another area in the house for deep reflection. Maybe in your room but not in bed. Your bed should be reserved for sleeping and resting (comfortable feelings) to avoid insomnia with bad emotions or thoughts.
- Avoid elevators when you leave your apartment to get groceries, medicines, etc. so you move your legs and avoid risky common areas.

The Do's:

- Find a place (maybe another room if you have enough space) to study-work, exercise, watch the news, etc.
- Be creative to use your entire apartment (e.g. balconies, bathroom, a nice corner for meditation, living room, even stairs to exercise and stretch your legs).

Stay Connected, Care for Your Loved Ones and Help Whoever is Around!

Be in touch with your loved ones, friends and why not! also care for people you may not know that much (roommates, neighbours, etc.).

If you live with other students, establish some social routines around the common areas. Attitudes of collaboration, empathy and mutual respect will help us maintain our health and those of others and strengthen our relationships.

Some strategies:

- Have routinely meetings (even online) with roommates, friends, family, etc.
- Cook together (yes...over a screen too!)
- Exercise together (dancing, yoga, etc.)
- Have lunch or dinner together,
- Find someone who is having a hard time and provide support.
- Take this time to tell them how much you care or to solve old conflicts

Helping others makes us feel good, connected, proud and strong!

Green, Nature and Fresh Air!

Confinement does not allow us to walk out to a park or place where we can properly feel mother nature, unless you have a garden or at least a balcony. However, we could use some tricks:

- Ventilate your room and apartment a few times everyday
- Use the balcony to rest, read, enjoy your coffee/tea or simply to watch the street (use a window if you don't have a balcony)
- Have direct natural light whenever possible
- Grow some plants (you may grow lentils, or beans; they grow pretty fast), water them, talk to them, find names for them
- Play sounds of nature (water-falls, rain, ocean waves, birds, etc.)
- Use mindfulness tricks (full attention) when you eat or in the shower (e.g. remain silent, close your eyes for a moment under the water and focus on your sensations).

Have a Positive (or at Least a Neutral) Mindset:

It is easy to fall inside the trap. Being pessimistic and sad is easy. The human brain does it naturally as a matter of survival and preparation for a difficult future. But this can also drag you down. You may argue that the situation is actually bad and it might get worse. And you might be right; reality is hard as it is. However, having your mindset stuck on this negativity will make you fearful, anxious and eventually sick. Our immune system is closely connected to our mind, and that is why it gets weaker when under too much stress. Shifting perceptions from negativity to neutral and from neutral to positivity is imperative to keep us strong and healthy.

We need our positive energy now!

Here are some strategies to help you switch from negative to positive (or at least neutral) emotions:

The Don'ts:

- Don't watch the news over and over again. It is good to be informed but you don't need to overdo it. Too much bad news will not add any good. Schedule when and from who (proper source) you will find information and do it once or twice per day maximum. You may also consider to have "news-abstinence" days to rest your mind and spirit from the impact of the situation.
- Don't watch drama, violent movies or even thrillers if you feel their contents will influence you in the wrong direction, feeding your mind with obscure emotions, thoughts of despair and negativity will not help.
- Don't let pessimistic people influence you. Set limits with those who drag your mood down.

The Do's:

- Find humor and motivational activities to watch. Watch videos, movies, memes, motivational speeches, TEDx and articles that are encouraging and fun. Just watching some great Comedians and Humor Experts and entertainment programs daily will make you forget momentarily about the situation. We need to refresh our mind from reality a little everyday.
- Focus on situations (present, short or middle-term future) in which you have control. focusing on the negative events of these days and overthinking of a horrible future will not help you much. Focus on activities you can control such as attending your online classes, recording-editing your music, doing homework, talking to closed-ones, etc. It feels good to be in control.
- Focusing on the positive aspects of confinement. There are many. Now you have time to do the things you could not focused during your busy schedules. Read or write poetry, journal, grow plants, talk to your family, write thank-you notes or love letters, paint, rest, sleep, cook with new recipes...live.
- When you talk to others and yourself (self-talk) avoid using negative and catastrophic language.

Words matter!

- Have a good use of your sense of humor when you talk to others and to yourself.

"Relax! Everything is out of control!" ;')

Cry Baby...Cry all you need! But Put Yourself Together!

Cry all you need but do it so to make your sadness flow and express your pain and always with a deadline. Crying is a natural emotional expression of feelings such as sadness, despair, frustration. As an expression, using crying to release that tension is good. But be aware of letting yourself into the attitude of passivity.

Cry it out! Then put yourself together to keep on going!

Take Deep Breaths and Accept the Situation

Take deep (belly) breaths when you feel anxiety building up. Breathing in slowly, retain air for a few seconds and then exhale really, really slowly. This exercise will help you feel calm again. Accepting the situation and our lack of control over it will also help you lower your anxiety.

The Rule of Thumb is to NOT Make Things Worse!

Letting ourselves slide slowly towards a toxic and self-destructive journey is easier than we think. It happens easily and comfortably just by doing nothing else but letting out bad emotions rule. If you find yourself doing things such as overthinking, overeating (or eating unhealthy-junk food), drinking alcohol (or using drugs, including not prescribed medication) to deal with emotional distress, acting aggressively, rebellious and disobeying the confinement rules, creating conflicts (or making conflicts worse with loved ones or others), procrastinating, etc. Pay attention to your behavior! The automatic pilot of our minds will obey your emotional state.

Take control now!

You are already developing resilience and achieving great personal growth!

Acknowledgements:

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Resources:

Here are some more ideas and recommendations from other students as well!

The Greatest Speech Ever by Oprah Winfrey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkSgxuQrYwY>

Best Motivational Videos: Gratitude, Attitude...Energy, Power!!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08W7A7jAsOU>

Read incredible short motivational stories such as the last leaf by O. Henry in the following link.

<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/LasLea.shtml>

APA General resources for pandemics

<https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/pandemics>