

The “new normal” and mental health



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As we continue to progress through the various stages of COVID-19, life has changed for most people. There is a “new normal.” Most of us have changed our routines, activities, priorities, and the way we spend our free time. In addition to all the external changes, there are also internal changes at the mental, emotional, and physical levels.

In my psychotherapy practice, I have seen an increase in anxiety, depression, anger, anhedonia, sleep problems, and relationship issues.

Parents and children have spent months on end together in the home, and parents are stretched to perform all of their own required activities, plus to homeschool their children and monitor their learning. Children have been deprived of the ability to be with one another and to play normally.

Because of the lockdowns, children have been spending much more time with electronics and have become more attached to their phones, iPads, and computers. This has escalated a phenomenon that was already occurring before COVID-19. Parents are struggling to set limits with their children about how much screen time they can have. Single and separated parents have had the biggest challenge of all, as they have to wear more hats than ever.

Adult relationships have also been unmasked. Some couples have found that they are happier than ever, as they now can focus on each other without distractions. Others are experiencing the manifestation of problems that were lurking under the surface and that have only become more intense. In some cases, domestic violence has increased. Add to all of this the economic issues, loss of jobs, businesses, and lack of customary socialization, play and fun in our lives, and you have a mental health crisis.

As these five months have now gone by, many people have settled into new patterns. While these new patterns may be different, we can still try to make lemonade out of lemons. Focusing more intently on what we do have, what we can do, and how to connect meaningfully with others can make a positive difference. Radical self-care and having a routine are also very helpful in self-regulation and managing fluctuating emotions. A daily routine contributes highly to a sense of well-being. Regular exercise has made a positive difference for many, as evidenced by the fact that there is now a waiting list for most home gym equipment.

Keeping yourself mentally and physically healthy during the “new normal “requires attending to psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of ourselves. Try to do one thing every day for each of these dimensions. Even if we are living and working from home most of the time, we can still be creative, manage our time wisely, and engage in constructive activities. This requires us to take full responsibility for our well-being.

Never before have we been in a position where so much has been both taken away and given to us at the same time.

Let’s all look for the opportunities that we have during this temporary pandemic, and make some important positive changes to take with us into the future. When we are trying to cope with things that are beyond our control, we can always decide not to let ourselves be psychologically controlled by the uncontrollable. Stay active and be creative. This too shall pass.

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