Why doing things for 'you' is important whilst in self-isolation due to COVID-19

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Australians in self-isolation due to COVID-19 are more time-poor than ever as they cope with the mental anguish and practical changes to their day to day lives caused by the pandemic.

I've noticed many of my clients are experiencing the full range of emotions right now. Under such stressful circumstances, many clients appear to be focussed on getting through the day (chasing children, cooking and conference calls), neglecting to engage in their own self-care practices.

Even though it might feel selfish to take time for yourself in the context of this upheaval, incorporating habits of self-care into your day is crucial.

By practising what is known in psychology as 'emotional first aid' during this time of suffering, you will feel more capable of supporting your partner, parenting your children, getting your work done, and coping with the ups and downs of the months ahead.

Here are my tips:

1. **Acknowledge the struggle & be compassionate to yourself**

It is can be helpful to remind yourself that t's normal and natural to have down days. It's okay to complain that what has happened is unfair. Try and be compassionate to yourself for things that have gone wrong. Your loved

ones will also benefit from hearing you say 'I understand' (rather than minimizing) if they express similar concerns.

2. **Accept issues outside of your control & address issues within your control**

I've noticed that clients taking a more accepting stance to the pandemic are faring better. Accepting that the pandemic is outside of your control is an important step in moving forward with the emotional pain and anxiety it's caused. To expand your attitude, try practising some acceptance meditations on a daily basis. Smiling Mind and UCLA both have great free programs to access.

Think about the current worries and problems (e.g., going to Centrelink and register) that you can do something about. Don't avoid or procrastinate on these issues as this can cause you to unhelpfully dwell on issues. Instead, make plans to solve problems. Here is a great link to some problem-solving templates to help.

3. **Try to create a life in the home outside of the pandemic**

Ensure that the focus in your home is on creating a life during the pandemic. Whilst it's important to keep updated on all that is happening, turn the 24-hour news cycle off, and make sure there is a focus on the creation of new experiences.

4. **Develop a daily routine & change up weekends**

A daily timetable helps you stay on track when negative emotions are interfering with your motivation to get going with various tasks and activities. Getting showered and dressed each day will add to your mood and motivation for the day ahead. Find ways to distinguish the days of the week from the weekend so they don't blend into one. For most people, weekends are for recharging and spending time with loved ones – if it's possible, continue to use the weekend in this way.

Small or big, write down the positive moments you experience each day and tell the people you love about them.

5. **Look after your physical health**

Regular exercise is hugely beneficial. Consider exercising in sunlight (if that is feasible) as this will have an additive benefit to your mood and energy levels. If you are due for a procedure or check-up, arrange a telehealth appointment with your GP to determine the urgency of the procedure and coming in for a face to face appointment.

6. **Seek out valued experiences & socialise**

Brainstorm your top 5 'words to live by' during the pandemic, and organise experiences that are meaningful for you and those you love. Think online book clubs and virtual parties.

For those isolating with families, prioritise strengthening these relationships. I've been seeing a lot of bonds within partnerships and families improving, which is great. Apps like House Party and Whereby are great for reconnecting with old friends. If you are single, consider going on a virtual date, it's a lot more time-effective than face-to-face dating!

7. **Do something creative**

Engaging in something creative can help you manage stress. Remember that creative pursuits help you recharge, centre and be more present with your work and family life.

8. **Find ways to help others**

The great thing about helping others is that not only are you doing good for another person, it also fosters personal fulfilment and satisfaction. This could involve picking up groceries for the neighbours, joining a charity, or doing some probono work.

9. **Find ways to laugh**

It might seem strange, but being able to get through struggle with your sense of humour intact is beneficial. We have all experienced the jokes about COVID-19 and its management exchanged at this time via social media. Laughter can help you bond with others, put the situation in perspective, and can help foster acceptance of the uncertain aspects of the situation.

10. **Educate yourself**

There are so many helpful books, podcasts, and talks out there that can help through this challenging time. Guy Winch's Ted Talk on emotional first aid. Is great. My go-to book for clients struggling with life circumstances isis Viktor Frankl's 'Man's Search For Meaning'.

If you are struggling, please see your GP and discuss whether counselling might be appropriate. Telehealth services are now available around Australia.