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## COUNTY FOCUS

### *Emotional Survival for introverts and extroverts During COVID-19*

Social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to some intense emotional reactions. We can no longer live in the usual ways.

If you are introverted, being alone is your thing, right? Well, not completely, as you probably found out. You may not miss prolonged socializing or being in large groups, but brief daily interactions weren't so bad. It's hard not to see someone's smile behind their face mask or sharing an occasional handshake.

Undoubtedly you miss your team and social network more intensely if you are extroverted. Real-life human interactions energize and recharge you. But those, face-to-face group meetings are not an option right now, just like restaurants, family celebrations and noisy gym classes. Zoom meetings help somewhat but can leave you feeling a little empty.

#### SURVIVAL STRATEGIES REGARDLESS OF YOUR PERSONALITY STYLE

- 1) **To combat loneliness:** Pay it forward and honor those people you value. Reach out to them with a phone call or an old fashioned written card. Don't wait for them to contact you first. Additionally, create a solid social calendar with scheduled online meetups.
- 2) **Depression/Apathy:** We mourn our usual routine. This grieving process for "what used to be" is normal and adjusting to change can be emotionally exhausting. Cut yourself some slack. It's ok to be operating at less than 100% capacity. Do less, but keep your cadence; set the alarm, keep your daily rituals of coffee, getting dressed (in something other than sweats) and taking breaks.
- 3) **Anxiety:** Everything about COVID-19 has led to fears about personal safety for us and others. The new normal evolves daily and nothing feels certain. There is a lot of unknown ahead. Educate yourself with credible sources and focus on what you can control, one day at a time. Limit your media exposure. Dance in your kitchen!
- 4) **Guilt/Self-Criticism:** Middle class security or success guilt is common, especially if you have loved ones who are more vulnerable. Name it, then take action; send money, volunteer or just listen.
- 5) **Anger:** When we feel anxious and helpless, it may be behaviorally expressed as anger. Discharge your agitated energy with exercise or talking to a neutral person. Scream in the car when you are alone and won't scare anyone.
- 6) **The silver lining:** We have slowed down a bit and have more time to reflect. Downtime boosts creativity. Read inspirational stories, contribute to community projects, journal for 20 minutes a day.



What really matters to an introvert or extrovert? Maintaining a few powerful connections with friends and nature reinforces our resiliency, but don't forget that the most important relationship is with yourself.

The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program EAP is here for you during this stressful time. Call (408) 241-7772 or email to schedule a ZOOM appointment with one of our therapists.

Visit our webpage at <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/eap/Pages/Employee-Assistance-Program>.

Meet the counselors on our 4 minute video: <https://youtu.be/F0p5wbqJAGM>

*Don't Go Through It Alone*



## STAYING FIT

### *Establishing a Training Mindset*

Experts recommend getting a minimum of two and a half hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week. If you increase the intensity, or do a combination, that number changes. Take some time to think about your weekly regimen: How often do you exercise? How often do you work out? How often do you train? Before you think “Ha, that is the same question asked three different ways,” consider the differences in word choice.

Language is powerful. We hear it in every conversation we have and experience it in movies, books, and speeches on the news. It even influences us to click on that link that pops up that exclaims “Five Tips to Have the Best Life Ever.” So how can changing vocabulary help you on your fitness journey?

#### MOTIVATION

While definitions vary, it might be helpful to think about these concepts in the following ways:

- **Exercise:** any physical activity that requires movement. This ranges from hardcore sessions at the gym to taking your dog on a walk, stretching, or mowing the lawn. As long as you do a specific movement for at least 30 minutes, it can count as exercise.
- **Work out:** Intentional exercise. This might include a fitness class, weightlifting, or time doing cardio.
- **Training:** Developing a lifestyle for your specific goals. This means that you incorporate activity into your routine regularly, and engage in specific workouts that vary in intensity and purpose.

While the difference in terms might seem subtle, fitness experts agree that for maximum results, you need a variety of activities,



including cardio, strength, flexibility, and recovery. Finding the proper balance of these activities for your goals is key, and having a plan will help you find the right balance.

Think of someone who trains for a marathon; to be successful, that person doesn't just run. Instead, each running session is part of a specific regimen that will prepare them for the goal of running 26.2 miles. Some days have longer runs, and some days contain shorter jogs, where some days include alternative exercises, rest, and diet choices. All of these work together to guarantee a higher chance of success.

#### PERKS OF TRAINING

Your training goals may be to increase endurance so you can play with your children, to increase strength and flexibility to improve quality of life, to lose weight, or gain better health readings. You do not have to be an Olympic athlete to get the benefits of training. Choose to prioritize your goals and health needs by deciding to train your body and mind.



## THINKING WELL

### *Self-Compassion*

With all the talk about “self-care,” it can be easy to think that if we just do things to treat ourselves, we will feel happier and enjoy life more. At the same time, fitting in all of these recommended self-care tasks while also managing life can seem overwhelming. Where should you start?

How about shifting focus from what you do to what you want to be?

#### TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Compassion means “to suffer with.” Most people experience compassion at some point, whether it's result of seeing a sad story on the news or listening to a loved one's difficulties. This experience can often motivate actions, as well. For example, you might donate to a cause or offer kind words to a loved one.

What we so often fail to do is offer a loving response to ourselves.

Self-compassion involves viewing and treating yourself in a different way. Instead of judgment, criticism, and cruelty, it is possible to offer yourself kindness and understanding. Choosing to be loving toward yourself is not weak, narcissistic, selfish, or complacent. Actually, research has shown that those who practice self-compassion:

- Showed more strength in adjusting to difficult situations in life, earlier and with more lasting effects.
- Have a more emotionally stable view of themselves whether praise or criticism is received.

- Were perceived as more caring, accepting, and encouraging of autonomy by partners in intimate relationships.
- Are more motivated to engage in positive change

#### CHOOSE COMPASSION

Choosing to treat yourself with compassion is not based on your confidence, feelings, success, or any other factor. It is a choice. This choice acknowledges that life is full of all kinds of experiences and feelings: sadness, anger, happiness, disappointment, confusion, satisfaction, and grief to name a few. The goal, then, is to be caring toward yourself in any and all situations, which includes paying attention to how you speak to yourself.

Here are some simple ways to be kind to yourself:

- Consider how you would respond to a friend, small child, or animal, and offer yourself a similar response.
- Remember that everyone suffers. You are not alone, and there is not necessarily anything “wrong” with you.
- Give yourself permission to be imperfect.
- Speak with a supportive person, whether that is a friend, family member, or mental health professional.

Since we are human beings (not human doings), don't just do self-care, be aware, compassionate, and present.



## PEAK PERFORMANCE

### Engaging the Senses

Have you ever heard of a sensory diet? Just like changing the food you eat can aid your body in achieving health and wellness, adding or adapting certain sensations in a daily routine can help your brain. For example, being over- or under-stimulated can result in poor attention, habitual behaviors, and other difficulties. Already well known in the Occupational Therapy world, sensory diets have been used to aid in treatment for ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, learning disabilities, Anxiety, Depression, PTSD, and Schizophrenia.

Certain signs and symptoms of sensory-related problems are best addressed with a professional, but the benefits of knowing about sensory techniques can help to optimize your life.

#### HOW MANY SENSES ARE THERE?

While we are taught about the five basic senses - sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing - there are three more senses that are also a primary focus in a sensory diet. They include

- **Tactile:** Sensations such as touch, pain, temperature, and pressure.
- **Vestibular:** Refers to the system within the inner ear that plays a role in identifying movement and position of the head, like when tilting, spinning, or swinging.
- **Proprioceptive:** This system involves the muscles, joints, and tendons that help to alert the brain to body position; this sense helps with fine motor skills as well as full body movements.

#### CHANGING YOUR DIET

So what can you do to help your brain operate at its peak? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Sight:** Switch lightbulbs, simplify cluttered areas, and consider using lamps instead of overhead lights.
- **Taste/Smell:** Utilize aromatherapy or scented lotions, or have mints, gum, tea, or other candies available. You can also try having different temperature beverages and/or sucking through a straw.
- **Proprioceptive:** Have resources like stress balls or a weighted blanket available, and consider going up and down stairs or moving heavy items. Incorporate physical activity into daily routine and breaks.
- **Hearing:** Use white noise machines or classical music in the background.
- **Vestibular:** Have a chair that provides desired stimulation, like a rocking chair or an office chair. Swing in a hammock, or do some dancing.

Remember, you either want to calm down or awaken the senses, so consider making changes that play to your individual needs. Paying attention to all of your senses during daily routine and when you notice you are getting bored or upset can make all the difference!



## SOUND FINANCES

### Financial Psychology

The basics of budgeting are simple: don't spend more than you earn, and put some money away into savings. Yet, people do not always adhere to these principles. This may lead to feelings such as guilt, stress, and frustration, along with negative self-talk about being irresponsible, lazy, or stupid. However, just because budgeting is simple, it does not mean it is easy. Humans are complex, and so is the relationship that we have with money.

#### GETTING TO THE ROOT

Financial Psychology is a relatively new branch of study that applies psychological and behavioral principles to our relationship with money. The goal is to understand where people learned their "money scripts" that, in essence, direct their choices with money.

This is not done by simply lecturing about budgeting, the importance of retirement, or any concept that is understood primarily in the rational mind. Emotion plays a large role in all of our choices, including those surrounding money. We can study all the textbooks and stock market trends, but if we do not also pay attention to the way our history has shaped us, we will be missing a lot of valuable information.

#### BRANCHING OUT

So, what are your "money scripts?" Do you find yourself doing the same thing your parents did? Or perhaps the complete opposite? To get started on your journey to financial clarity and peace, ask yourself:

1. What did your parents teach you about money? See if you can identify 3 - 5 items.
2. What are some of your earliest memories with money?
3. What is the most painful memory that you had with money? The most joyful?
4. How would you describe your relationship with money?
5. What current factors, do you think, are influencing how you use your money?

When you spend time looking at all of the dynamics that are working together, you can be kinder to yourself as you learn to make wiser choices that will pay off in more ways than one.



## COACH APPROACH

### Developing a Self-Care Habit

“Actions speak louder than words” is a saying that you might have heard, at one point or another. It is often paired with the idea that someone needs to follow through on a promise.

Take a few moments to think about the promises that you make to yourself. Do your actions line up with those words? Do you take care of yourself in the ways that you promise?

#### WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

To care for something means that you show concern, attention, and interest. It also means that you attempt to fulfill any needs. Self-care, then, is applying all of these things to yourself. You are simply making sure you’re doing ok and that your needs are met.

Self-care is not a fad.

Self-care is not a chore.

Self-care is not selfish.

Self-care is essential to living a rich and meaningful life. It encourages you to value yourself-- your body, time, energy, and emotions. Incorporating a regular routine of self-care can help to prevent burnout and fatigue because it helps you to “fill your cup” with pleasant and beneficial experiences. Then, you can pour from your enjoyment-filled cup, with purpose, joy, and gratitude instead of bitterness and frustration.

#### SELF-CARE TIPS

In order to get the maximum effect, strive to incorporate self-care into your daily routine, checking in with yourself multiple times a

day. Showing concern, attention, and interest in yourself means that you will get to know yourself better. What do you really enjoy? How are you feeling right now? What are your triggers? These little self-assessments can help you slow down and make wiser choices that will benefit you in more ways than one.

Here are some other areas to consider:

- **Eating:** What foods are good for my body? How often should I eat so I stay awake and calm?
- **Sleeping:** How much sleep do I need every night? How can I improve my sleep habits?
- **Exercise:** How often do I exercise? Do I incorporate cardio, flexibility, and strength-training to provide my body all of its needs?
- **Social:** Do I enjoy big crowds or intimate gatherings? Do I spend enough time with people who energize and encourage me?
- **Treats:** What are comfort foods that improve my mood, and how can I balance them with foods that are good for my body? Do I have time and money to buy a massage, vacation, or other item/service?

Self-care is really about being intentional. Instead of doing things “just to get them done” or in the same way you always have, you can follow through on your old promises, or make some new ones in 2020. Either way, let your actions speak loud and proud!



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