

Coronavirus: Building Mental Health Resilience

Resilience is the process of finding healthy ways to adapt and cope with adversity and distress. Building resilience can be key to helping us get through the Coronavirus crisis and its aftermath. It can help protect us from various mental health symptoms, such as depression, anxiety and traumatic stress. And it can help those of us who already have mental health conditions cope better. Prior tragedies have shown the power of resilience. Knowing this, and how to build resilience, can be a source of great hope for many people. In fact, people can even experience emotional growth after a tragedy.



Building Resilience. Everybody's experience is different. Genetics can play a role, so certain resilience factors may come more naturally to some. Others may need to practice and build resilience skills. For those who are curious, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale assesses various dimensions associated with a person's resilience.

If you want to work towards being on the higher end of this scale, there are many evidence-based strategies to build resilience. These tactics have demonstrated positive impacts and may be helpful in addressing potential traumatic stress from the pandemic.

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Anxiety About The End Of Coronavirus Lockdown Is More Common Than You'd Think

With everyone else stuck at home, there's no FOMO to lure you out of bed for a Sunday brunch when you'd really rather sleep in. Without a chatty co-worker at the desk next to you, your productivity is way up — and honestly, the WFH set-up is more than functional. As certain states begin to emerge from coronavirus lockdown, some people are anxious as they prepare for post-quarantine life, after finding that a quieter, slower pace at home is really working for them.

"Life is simply easier and less stressful when there's nowhere to go," says Robin, 34, who describes herself, pre-coronavirus, as a workaholic. "I am not looking forward to having to plan everything out again, having to run all over the place and stick to a tight schedule. There's less room to enjoy life that way," she adds.

"I've been seeing contentedness in the faces of some of my therapy clients as they describe the odd sense of relief and stillness they've experienced since life as we know it changed," clinical psychologist Caroline Fleck, Ph.D., tells Bustle. "There is something indisputably restorative about just being — particularly in a society that heavily orients us towards doing," Fleck says.

Claire, 32, is struggling with conflicting feelings of grief and joy regarding re-entry. "The thought of the world opening back up again is giving me a lot of relief, but also anxiety — it feels like I'm being forced out of this sacred nest that we've created here where there are no social obligations or expectations, just time to be together," she tells Bustle. She adds that post-quarantine, she'll need an adjustment period before she is ready to put anything on her calendar again. Of course, no one wants coronavirus to keep raging across the country, necessitating continued lockdowns. But after two months in quarantine, people are starting to realize that their lifestyle and values are more aligned than ever. Kelsey, 28, is so well adjusted to life at home that she's feeling anxiety and dread about this next phase. She's particularly concerned that her new health standards won't align with what her friends and coworkers are doing to keep coronavirus at bay.

Louise, 30, is "terrified" to pop the harmonious bubble she's created at home. "To be honest, I've loved being able to spend so much time with my dog, and being able to work on my apartment, put all of my energy into my home life, it's made me feel really positive and grateful," she says. She feels "wrong" being so comfortable at home while essential workers and sick patients don't have the same luxury.

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Kurt's Korner

Staying Informed

The Greek word “philosopher” literally means, “lover of knowledge.” Back in ancient Greece, those who loved knowledge were probably those who could attain knowledge... which likely was not easy, what with no telephones, television, or mass-printed books. But, it is much easier to be a lover of knowledge nowadays. The information is all around us in every direction. Television, books, encyclopedias... the list goes on and on.

Mental health consumers have to strive to be, “lovers of knowledge” as well. Today, it is easier than ever to be just that. There are many powerful tools we have to acquire almighty knowledge in the battle against mental illness. These tools include advice from our physicians, books, television, radio, and what I believe is the most important one of all – the internet. It is through these sources that we can “arm” ourselves with all-important knowledge to “battle” mental illness. It is through the aforementioned sources – especially the internet – that we can acquire much needed knowledge about mental illness. In this article, we will explore just two of the many credible, comprehensive, quality sources of information on mental illness on the internet.

The first is NAMI: The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). NAMI is an excellent organization with a website for mental health information. It's a grassroots organization that is, “dedicated to the eradication of mental illness and to the improvement of the quality of life...” for people suffering from mental illness. NAMI can be accessed at <http://www.nami.org>. NAMI offers reliable information on almost any mental illness on their website. Furthermore, NAMI offers educational programs on mental illness (peer to peer, family to family, etc.), and, support groups through state and local NAMI chapters. NAMI also fights stigma pertaining to mental illness by watching the media for inaccurate portrayals of mental illness and pointing those inaccuracies out, providing personal testimonies by sufferers, and, hosts a “walk-a-thon” each year to raise money for and awareness about mental illness. Finally, NAMI advocates on behalf of those who suffer from mental illness by being a major interest group that lobbies on behalf of those with mental illness... which includes grassroots, “action-center” lobbying (we send emails and call our politicians using a script NAMI provides).

NAMI is but one excellent example of the many great resources on the internet. I've saved what I consider the best as the other detailed in this article. Medlineplus, located at <http://www.medlineplus.gov>, is a federally sponsored website that brings together the National Library of Medicine (another great resource), the National Institute of Mental Health, and other government agencies pertaining to health in general. I like to think of it as a one-stop, indispensable encyclopedia of health information across all spectrums – including mental health. It contains news, a medical encyclopedia (that the public can understand), a medical dictionary, links to local health resources, and, a multitude of other resources. Everything you need to know about the medications is contained on Medlineplus.gov. It is a wonderful source for both mental health professionals, and, for John Q. Mental Health.

These two examples are but a few of the slew of credible resources we have via the beauty of the internet. There are many more. We must find and utilize the information on these websites and others in order to optimize our mental health. Let us utilize all the resources we have and embody the mental health version of the Greek philosophers as we become, “lovers of mental health knowledge.” It is through knowledge about mental illness that we can better dodge the “slings and arrows” it throws at us.

*Kurt Warner, LMSW, Vice President, MHA Board of Directors and
Community Housing Manager at Catholic Charities of Cortland County*



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Practice Radical Acceptance. This pandemic is out of our control — we cannot will it away — and it is therefore important to accept the current situation for what it is. Being able to manage and cope with uncertainties we cannot control is a form of resilience. To practice this, you can apply Dialectical Behavioral Therapy’s distress tolerance skills, particularly radical acceptance, to learn to be okay despite this crisis.

Embrace Realistic Optimism. This concept is the ability to identify challenges and overcome them by focusing on what is solvable. In the case of coronavirus, experts told us to expect steep increases in infections, but also that social distancing could “flatten the curve.” While it’s important to understand the severity of the situation, it’s even more important to focus on what we each can do to help lessen the negative impact, which in this case, is staying home as much as possible. Through realistic optimism, we can believe in our ability to flatten the curve and focus our efforts on making that a reality.

Reframe Negative Thoughts. Sometimes it’s challenging to separate thoughts from feelings. Negative thoughts can be overwhelming and make you feel significantly worse. One way to overcome them is by reframing, or challenging, those negative thought patterns. Instead of telling yourself that “nothing will ever be the same,” you can reframe it to “maybe something positive can come from this, such as employers allowing people to work from home more often.”

Try Problem Solving. It can be helpful to address immediate concerns by thinking creatively. This approach can also help you manage interruptions in your daily routine. You may not be able to attend fitness classes anymore, but you can try online fitness classes. You may not be able to spend time with friends in person, but you can host a game night over Facetime or Zoom. You may not be able to go listen to live music, but you can tune-in to special programming, such as the Together at Home Concert.

Consider Adaptive Resilience. This concept is the ability to learn from the past, understand current capabilities and to anticipate tomorrow’s threats. For example, the current crisis has increased awareness of issues in our health care system. You can engage in advocacy work to reform health care through nonprofits such as NAMI. Using your energy, or even distress, to create positive change is a great example of resilience.

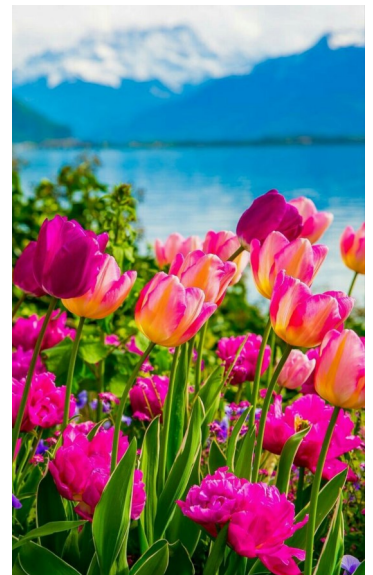
Find Resilience Role Models. Let yourself be inspired by the actions of historical and current heroes in the face of great adversity. You can learn about them through movies, biographies or news stories about those on the front line of this crisis, like health care workers. When you feel like you can’t take this situation, or need a sense of strength, you can look to these role models and learn from them.

Be There for Others. Seek out and offer empathetic and compassionate support for friends, family and others in similar situations. It promotes understanding and coping for the person giving and receiving support. You can also help people through mutual aid and other volunteer work. There are many ways to help high-risk groups, such as the elderly and other immune-suppressed or -compromised individuals in this crisis. Also act on your sense of right or wrong. For example, respecting social distancing and not hoarding groceries safeguards us individually and collectively.

Find Humor When You Can. Humor is a powerful coping strategy. For example, it was extremely effective for Vietnam Prisoners of War. Finding and sharing humor in aspects of this crisis (aka the great American TP panic) can help us take control of our circumstances and connect with each other.

Practicing Positivity. There are certain mindsets that can help build resilience: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and above all, love, which can occur in adverse circumstances. The Broaden-and-Build Theory states that positive thoughts and feelings broaden our awareness and encourage novel, varied and exploratory thoughts and actions, which help people build skills and resources. So, find what you are grateful for and write it down. Think about what gives you a sense of hope. And give love to those in your life.

*Reprinted from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), by Katherine Ponte.
Read the entire article [here](#).*





Working Out From Home In Quarantine Is Worth It For Your Mental Health

In the beginning of quarantine (which at this point feels like the beginning of time), you were pretty good about getting in your daily jogs and Pilates sessions. But 10 weeks in, you've drained the internet of all its exercise videos, and even when you've paid to join a new Zoom workout, you just don't have the mental energy to get started. As quarantine fatigue has set in, and you're falling out of your workout routine, you might find yourself sorely missing the mental health boosts from exercise.

"Working out from home is tough for anyone, particularly the motivation to start," says Bethany Stillwaggon, a certified personal trainer and master coach for boutique fitness concept Row House. It might be general quarantine fatigue, or it could be the specific ways the pandemic has disrupted your routine. Even when your brain knows that exercising every day will help regulate your mood and give you a jolt of happiness hormones, it can feel impossible to get started again once you lose momentum.

Stillwaggon suggests asking yourself specific questions to help figure out why you can't bring yourself to exercise even when you want to. "Is it that your home is chaotic or messy? Is it just setting aside the same time every day for your workout? Is it knowing where to start or what to do? Or is it just to even work out at all?" If you need to do a bit of household decluttering before you exercise, try clearing one area to work out in first, to help prove to yourself that you can indeed tackle the kitchen next. If you can't find the time, don't know where to start, or straight-up don't have the energy to move, meet yourself where you're at and take it very slow. Just a little push to get yourself into a single stretch can go a long way toward getting those daily mental health lifts again.



My own personal training clients have found it helpful to tie physical activity to things they already do every day. Try a few arm circles before brushing your teeth, and shake your wrists out (all that typing!) every time your phone buzzes with a notification. You might be turned off by the idea of running outside with a mask, but you can still stand by your window and reach your arms toward the ceiling to give your rib cage a nice stretch. While you're waiting for your life-saving coffee to brew, grab the kitchen counter and send your hips back with a neutral spine, creating a deep stretch in your hamstrings. These moves might not be complete workouts on their own, but putting them together throughout the day can help you feel steady enough to exercise more fully.

Even if you're used to more heart-pounding workouts, those stretches between emails definitely "count." Stretching brings a surge of nutrients and oxygen to your muscles. The extra blood flow can improve your mood and increase your energy levels, and who knows? Maybe you'll be inspired enough to drop into a squat or two.

That may be all you need to get going. "You don't need much equipment, space, or time to get in a mini strength and mobility workout that will get your blood flowing and your energy up," says Nate Helming, co-founder of the training community The Run Experience and strength coach for the running app Strava. All you need is the random few minutes you're stuck with before your next Zoom meeting — and let's face it, you could use a mood boost before the seventh virtual meeting of the day.

"Try doing a ladder of squats and pushups," Helming suggests. "Start at two reps of each, then do four reps of each, and work all the way up to 10 reps of each (for 30 reps total). Feel free to modify the movements, drop the reps to eight, or add in more rest breaks. The victory is that you took five to 10 minutes to move your body in a positive way that will not only add to your fitness, but to your general mental health and well-being throughout the day."

Start small, Stillwaggon says, and celebrate successes on your own terms. If getting out of bed to get a glass of water is the most active you can get your body to be today, that's OK. Make it a goal to get up for two glasses of water tomorrow. Phone a friend for accountability and support if you need to, and keep breathing in that sweet, healing oxygen.

Reprinted from Bustle, by Bethany Stillwaggon and Nate Helming. Read the article [here](#).



Anxiety About The End Of Coronavirus Lockdown Is More Common Than You'd Think...*Continued from page 1*

And for Quinn, 28, the lack of adjustment periods between extremes is disorienting. "I feel like an abrupt transition back will not only be jarring but probably stressful because I'm going to be going back to some bastardized version of normal."

Not everyone has found quarantine life to be "enlightening," and it has "exacerbated if not caused mental health symptoms" in many, Fleck says. But for those who find themselves anxious about returning to their normal lives, Fleck points to the psychological benefits of focusing on the present and learning to accept your life as it is, without judgment. "Solitude and mindfulness can be antidotes for FOMO and dis-ease," she says. These practices, Fleck adds, can temper our innate drive to keep up with what we see on Instagram.

Although forced isolation might make it easy to slow down, it's not the only way to practice mindfulness. You don't need to be in the middle of a pandemic in order to carve out time to connect with loved ones or to relax at home. "For those who find themselves reluctant to return to the unrealistic demands and sensory overload that seem to define normal life at times, my advice is simple: don't." Instead, Fleck suggests approaching post-lockdown life with intention. Pledge to turn down work-week plans or to spend weekends alone. Keep cooking or going on long walks or whatever is giving you peace right now. And as we slowly move back towards our old lives, it's important to remember that nothing will be the same. "Allow yourself to be changed by the changes you've endured," Fleck adds.

"Post-quarantine, I will definitely be more cautious with my personal and family time," Kelsey tells Bustle. "I will not let my social calendar get overwhelming ever again, and I will try to carve out at least one day a week with just my family, quarantine-style."

Reprinted from Bustle, by Kaitlyn Wylde. Read the article [here](#).

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SUPPORT

For more information about the status of community events and support groups normally listed here, including online or virtual meetings or support groups, please contact the organizations below:

Food for Thought—lbarbin@fscortland.org
Cortland LGBTQ Resource Center—(607) 756-8970
Caregivers Support Group—(607) 753-5060
Family Support Group—namifingerlakes.org
607 Healing Hearts—607healinghearts@gmail.com

COVID-19 Mental Health Resources

NYS Office of Mental Health Emotional Support Helpline—1-844-863-9314

Cortland County Mental Health Department—(607)758-6100

2-1-1 Cortland—For information and referral to health & human services in Cortland County. Dial 2-1-1 or visit 211Cortland.org

If you have an upcoming community event or article you would like considered for inclusion in the MHA Newsletter, send your submission to kristin@sevenvalleyshealth.org by the 14th of the month prior, or subscribe to the newsletter via email.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.