

COPING WITH COVID-19 THROUGH CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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In this unprecedented time that we are all experiencing, it is important to not only express yourself, but also to find ways to ease the stress while social distancing due to COVID-19. For families impacted by a serious health condition, the pandemic and its associated stressors may be particularly acute. I would like to share with you suggested ways to help you express what you are experiencing during this time and give you an outlet to help lighten the monotony of staying indoors every day.

To begin, let's all take a moment to take a deep breath and notice what and who is around you. I think that in a time of crisis this is important to reflect and take a moment to breathe. What are you grateful for right now? Practicing gratitude can positively impact your emotional well-being, especially during difficult times.¹ It can help remind you of how important your loved ones are and can help you feel more positive and worry less about the unknowns.² I encourage you to express gratitude once a day as well as create a schedule and find ways to express yourself while we are practicing social distancing.

While the pandemic is new territory for most of us, we are all trying to figure out how to find a balance between work and home, alone time and family time; where is the line and how do you handle such a unique situation? I encourage you all to find a routine or schedule that works for you. Also, find a way to differentiate your days off from work or school days; for example, find creative outlets on your days off or try a new exercise. I also find it helpful to limit intake of the news to once per day, watch trusted news sources and follow CDC guidelines.

Creative outlets and expression are so important, now more than ever. While it may be hard to practice social distancing, we can control how we express ourselves to help pass the time creatively. Expressing yourself through creativity may help improve your mood, build your self-esteem, and can be a different form of communication to release challenging feelings.

There are endless amounts of activities you can engage in, even if you do not consider yourself an artist or have limited materials on hand! I have always found that the hardest part is starting, but do not fret, there are ways to work through it. To begin, assess what materials you have at home and create a space home that is your "creative place." Depending on what you need, it can be a small corner in your room or a collective space in your home. Be open to trying something new. You can look online for inspiration or follow your own intuition! Go for it, don't hold back, and know there is not anything wrong that you will do when you are expressing yourself!

Many times, we are worried about the final product during the creative process, but in art therapy it is about the process and not the end result. While art therapy is facilitated by an art therapist, that does not mean that you cannot apply the same principles at home by yourself or with family members. Let go of expectations that you may have and dive into your own self-expression without judgment or attachment to your creativity. I think that you may find this to be a freeing experience and will allow you to expressive yourself fully!

See below for some inspiration I have come across over the years in the field about ways to express yourself:

See below for some inspiration and ways to express yourself:

CREATE:

- Make art to your favorite music
- Make ephemeral art, i.e., use chalk pastels and wipe your drawing away once it's completed; rip up art and turn the image into something else
- Create a Zentangle, a relaxing way to create beautiful images by drawing structured pattern. Simply fold a blank piece of paper into different shapes and create different designs in each folded section.
- Start scribbling and look for images within your scribble
- Draw with your non-dominant hand
- Draw yourself as a superhero
- Sing!
- Paint using only your body as your tools
- Create an image inspired from a book or movie

EXPLORE DIFFERENT MEDIUMS:

- Use natural materials to create art
- Crochet, sew or knit
- Create a sculpture using items that you plan on throwing away/recycled materials
- Create/paint a grounding stone
- Create an image only using calming colors
- Use two-three different mediums and see how they work together

REFLECT:

- Start a journal
- Create a gratitude collage or drawing
- Draw your feelings
- Create a box representing your feelings or memories
- Collage your experiences social distancing
- Take photos and edit/change them to reflect the mood of the image
- Make handprints and list your strengths/interests within the print
- Use clay or model magic to sculpt your feelings or use it to relieve frustration by stretching, smooshing, and pounding

MOVE:

- Practice yoga; create your own flow that works for you!
- Dance to your favorite music
- Have a freeze dance party with your loved ones

CONNECT:

- Create a mural with your loved ones (i.e., tape smaller pieces of paper together if you do not have access to mural paper)
- Start a doodle chain with family members
- Create a family tree with your loved ones
- Make collaborative art with your loved ones
- Create and send postcards to friends and family that you cannot see in person at this time
- Have a loved one tell you what to draw line by line and vice versa, then compare the drawings when finished
- Create art on a virtual chat with friends

These ideas are a good place to start, but I encourage you to be open and follow your inspiration wherever it takes you!

While creative expression may be a helpful outlet during a challenging time, if you or a loved one is experiencing depression or anxiety due to COVID-19, I strongly recommend reaching out to local therapy practices to connect to a professional to help you work through difficult emotions. Most therapists are seeing clients via telehealth and it's a great platform if you need someone to talk to during this time.

Remember that you are not alone and expressing yourself may help you through this unprecedented time. Stay safe, wash your hands, continue practicing guidelines recommended by the CDC and your local government officials, and happy creating!

* Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma America, Inc. is not a provider of medical advice, treatment or diagnosis. Before you take any action that may affect your health or safety, please consult with a healthcare professional.

1. Martínez-Martí, M. L., Avia, M. D., & Hernández-Lloreda, M. J. (2010). The Effects of Counting Blessings on Subjective Well-Being: A Gratitude Intervention in a Spanish Sample. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 13(2), 886-896. doi: 10.1017/S1138741600002535

2. Alkozei, A., Smith, R., & Killgore, W. D. S. (2017). Grateful People Are Happy and Healthy—But Why? *Frontiers for Young Minds*, 5. doi: 10.3389/frym.2017.00055