



How to keep your head while keeping your social distance

There are people who are better at the whole social distancing game than others. If you already normally work from home, for instance, you might be laughing into your elbow as you listen to the newly homebound lament that their desire to binge on Netflix on the weekend isn't so appealing when they can do it 24/7. But whether you're an old hand at this or still an apprentice, the uncertain and often frightening course of this rapidly unfolding pandemic can upend even the most stoic of temperaments.

One thing we can control, however, is our behaviour. Hiding under the doona isn't going to offer anything more than a temporary reprieve from reality, so it's important to find ways to make the most of your quarantine. Psychologist Dr Nellie Lucas says creating "opportunities for calm" in the storm of worry and stress can be done with a sense of purpose.

"Begin by noticing the small things – appreciating the sunshine in the garden, the smell of coffee in the morning," says Lucas, who is principal clinical psychologist at Melbourne Clinical and Child Psychology. "Schedule times for social media and the news. A morning slot and an afternoon slot can work well for most of us. Similarly try and plan your day so work does not flow into rest and other activities. Recognising a need for balance can sustain you at a time when worry can escalate," she says.

Space patrol

If you're literally boxed in, with few options for outdoor pursuits beyond the supermarket, it might be useful to seek guidance from someone with experience being confined in tight spaces.

Astronaut Anne McClain, who was a flight engineer on the International Space Station (ISS) in 2019, recently shared some tips with her 125 million Twitter followers. Most are surprisingly applicable to those of us here on earth and focus on basics like self-care, including "hygiene, managing time and personal stuff, getting sleep, and maintaining mood". And because she had to share the ISS, there was advice on team care and group living, from respecting roles and responsibilities to being accountable, giving praise freely and keeping calm in conflict.

Another tip from astronauts: keep busy. They don't have a lot of time to sit around and stare into space. Okay, they do a bit of that, but like grandma used to say: an idle mind is the devil's workshop. In other words, engaging in physical and mental activities is a great way to stop your mind wandering into worst-case scenarios or terminal boredom.

Setting tasks and sticking to them not only provides structure to your day, completion brings the satisfaction of seeing a job well done, no matter how mundane. Your challenge is to recognise when you're slipping into an apathetic state (every now and then is fine) and refocus on a worthwhile pursuit.

Getting things done

Until very recently, few of us would have imagined that not having to spend hours commuting would result in an abundance of spare time to sort out all those pesky admin tasks we typically put off until they're overdue.

Structuring your day when you're isolated can restore a sense of purpose and normality to your daily life. The Australian Psychological Association recommends scheduling chores and activities you enjoy helping you stick to your routine.

Don't try to do everything at once. Set aside a few hours a day and imagine that once this crisis is over, you'll be so organised you can focus on getting back to normal, whatever that may be. Structuring activities around mealtimes and bedtime can also help you keep to your schedule while ensuring you eat regularly and get enough sleep.

As it happens, precarious times call for a keen eye on one's financial situation, so get stuck in. Drag out those receipts and take a deep dive into your taxes. Before you know it, you'll have everything ready to send to the accountant way before your return is due. Household budgets, bank accounts, insurance policies and superannuation are also good candidates for review. She advocates the time-honoured practice of allocating one-third of your income for housing costs, one-third for lifestyle-related activities, and one-third for savings.

Take some time out

"As our worries build, this can sometimes flow into stress upon our relationships," says Lucas. "Making time to plan and problem solve your approach to the day can ease this stress. It can also get you into the habit of problem solving rather than worrying, and feeling compassion rather than frustration." If you find you sometimes still struggle with bouts of stress or anxiety, it's normal. Don't be afraid to seek professional support as a psychologist or counsellor may be able to help.

Taking some time to maintain social networks can be as simple and easy as phoning a friend to share your experience, using video conferencing technology to check in on an elderly relative, or spending quality time with the people you live with. You can also shift gears and take your focus off you. It turns out altruism is often an unexpectedly beautiful benefit of calamity. We saw it during the recent bushfires and floods and the Australian Psychological Society says positive social connections can help us cope in times of stress, especially when we're being asked to distance ourselves from others.

Source: *Colonial First State*

If you need a hand working through your budget or just want to talk about options that might help you through this time, please give Shaun or Vicky a call – we also offer catch ups via Zoom so we can stay safe and maintain our social distancing.

We will guide you with a tailored approach that works for your circumstances. Give us a call on 4927 4588 (Rockhampton) or 4939 1766 (Yeppoon) to see how we can help.



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