

Mental Health Tips For the Family



1. Acknowledge & name feelings & thoughts

It can be helpful to acknowledge what you are thinking and feeling and then to 'name it'. For example, "I notice that I'm feeling down a lot today and thinking about how I miss seeing my friends." Or, "I'm noticing that I'm feeling anxious and I'm thinking a lot about stuff at work."

2. Know that it's normal!

Feeling edgy, stressed, or even depressed are common experiences given everything that has happened in our society recently. Drastic life changes coupled with feelings of uncertainty about the future are recipes for stress. There are many other people feeling overwhelmed right now.

3. Do something that makes you feel good

Deliberately treat yourself, especially when you are having a rough go. Wear a favorite shirt, paint your nails, take a bath, reorganize your room, blast your favorite tune up real loud, buy a special treat for yourself, or order your favorite take-out food etc.

4. Be gentle with yourself (& those around you!)

Now, more than ever is a good time to practice self-compassion and cut yourself some slack. Pay attention to your thoughts; Are you beating yourself up or being too critical? Being too hard on yourself or those around you usually just causes more stress. Allow yourself and others the grace to make mistakes or have a bad day.

5. Turn off the news and stop googling everything

Staying informed is a positive thing, but sometimes watching too much news or reading too much about the pandemic can cause excessive worrying or anxiety. Try limiting your news intake or turning it off for a couple days if you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or hopeless.

6. Get Moving!

Exercise can have a HUGE positive impact on mental health. So, get moving... every little bit helps! High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) workouts and strength training of large muscle groups have been shown to be most effective in decreasing feelings of depression and anxiety, as well as improving overall mental health. However, any movement is better than no movement.

7. Take kind and helpful actions

Deliberately go out of your way to take kind/helpful actions: pay someone a compliment, send a thinking of you card, or make a special craft for someone. Make it a challenge; everyone in the family has to do at least 3 helpful or kind deeds a day. Acts of service increase the endorphins of both the giver and the receiver.

8. Make a gratitude list

List 5 things you are grateful for each day. You can do this as a family during dinner or at bedtime- just make it a part of the daily routine. This can help keep things in perspective and counter negative thinking patterns.

9. Rose & thorn

Have family members share their 'rose' (best part of the day), as well their 'thorn' (toughest part of the day). This activity can bring forth meaningful conversation about what is going on with everyone. This can also be added to the daily family routine.

10. Take a deep breath & remind yourself that you are safe

Sometimes when people are really upset or overwhelmed it can literally feel like the 'sky is falling'- when in fact we are in no immediate danger. During these moments take a deep breath and count to ten. Remind yourself that presently you are safe and there is no imminent danger (e.g., the sky is not falling etc.). Next, become present to whatever it is that needs your attention in that moment (e.g., doing the dishes or a work task etc.).

If your feelings or problems just feel too big or too overwhelming and seem to be getting worse, then a good option is reaching out to a licensed therapist. This can help you weather the storm and become prepared for future ones.

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