



Parents Chime In:

Our Self-Care Strategies While Supporting Loved Ones with Mental Health Conditions During a Pandemic



In 2019, the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research’s (Transitions ACR) Family Advisory Board created a tip sheet called [For Families or Caregivers: Self-Care is Putting on YOUR Oxygen Mask First](#) to remind caregivers about the importance of intentional self-care. In the wake of COVID-19, that tried and true saying of “putting on your mask first before helping others” takes on a whole new meaning and it applies even more. We asked our Family Advisory Board members to provide thoughts on how they adapted their self-care strategies and to share tips on supporting their loved ones with mental health conditions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States’ response to keeping the virus in check has completely changed our lives and we may not see a return to “pre-COVID normal” for over a year. In addition to acknowledging the extreme circumstances, it can be important to remember that we can reframe the situation and see hope as we come out the other side of the pandemic.

This is what our Family Advisory Board members had to say:



Mara’s Advice

“Think about “value-based” goals for quarantine. It can help you feel like you are doing more than surviving and give you a sense of purpose.”

Value-based refers to those behaviors that are important to your family, such as volunteering. In this time of social distance, how does a family do this? They could [make masks and donate them](#). They could [paint rocks](#) and leave them out on walks they take to add brightness and color to the world.



They could let neighbors know when they are running errands and offer to add items needed to the list. Animal shelters may be impacted by social distancing, so you or your family could foster animals to help.

Margie’s Advice

“I focus on gratitude and write down 3 things every day that I am grateful for before going to bed.”

Practicing gratitude helps you notice the good things that are going on. Like trying to develop any new practice, it can take a while to see the benefits, so try to keep going. In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness.



Sara’s Advice

“Focus on breathing at times when you need to take a moment to relax.”

I use the [candle breath method](#) which helps me calm down when things are feeling tough. When I am out in public and other people are near me, I use ideas in the “[Loving Kindness Meditation](#)” to help me cope. I grant myself love and kindness and send out that same message, silently to them.



Marcela’s Advice

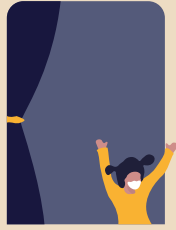
“When you’re having a rough day and struggling, remember to treat yourself like your best friend and be kind.”

Would you talk down to a friend or would you help to bring them up and support them when they’re down? Building your resilience will help you during this difficult situation. We are all together in this challenging situation and we need to be kind to ourselves. Also, be authentic about how you are feeling with others

Irene’s Advice

“Sometimes we have to just embrace the funny and share it with friends.”

It’s important to find the humor wherever you can and try and keep lighthearted when you can.



Bonnie's Advice

"We focus on how the COVID-19 situation has actually improved our lives."

Some positive impacts include: developing stronger life skills and being more respectful of each other, spending more time with loved ones, not having to commute, developing new health habits. We are enjoying being outdoors more, and we are not getting caught up in the news.

Cathy's Advice

"This is an opportunity to start new rituals, which can improve your mental health, such as a weekly Skype call with a group of friends you don't see often, or a weekly family game night."

It's a good time to reach out to someone you haven't connected with in a long time. Make amends if you need to.

Debi's Advice

"Maintain a schedule as much as possible and get up at the same time every day. Have something specific to do each morning first thing to keep on schedule."

For me, I wake up and walk the dog. The predictability of simple tasks can help reduce anxiety. When my daughter was off her schedule it was hard on her, so we work to keep her on a routine also. I encouraged her to stay engaged with other people online regularly so she doesn't feel as isolated which can lead to deeper depression.



Susan's Advice

"I use a lot of the websites online that offer free classes and concerts. This takes me away from my worries for a while."

My local yoga studio provides yoga classes that are donation based. Search the web for free concerts, podcasts, and videos.



Jean's Advice

"Plan for your worst days and help your family members do the same."

Our emotions are so up and down right now. On a day I was feeling good, I spent some time filling this document out: [Being Ready for the Worst Days](#) and had my daughter do the same. It helped us remember what resources we have available to us when things get hard, and now we can be more prepared.

Jill's Advice

"Take a ride alone. Put on your favorite music. Even if the destination is the pharmacy to pick up your loved one's meds."

Just having a few minutes of alone time can help your mental health.



More Tips From Our Family Advisory Board:

- ◆ It's also okay to make a **conscientious decision to have a “do nothing day”** or “binge watch TV” day. This can be part of taking care of your mental health.
- ◆ **Meet online and have lunch with colleagues** over Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Facebook Live, etc.
- ◆ **Help your young adults organize their own lunch dates or game dates** with friends.
- ◆ **Maintain traditions and rituals through online gatherings.** Many of us had Easter and Passover gatherings virtually this year. They aren't the same as in person, but they brought a richness and an intention that was rewarding.
- ◆ **Thank people on the front line** when you can. It makes their day and makes you feel good also.
- ◆ If everything is overwhelming, **take a nap, if possible.** Rest, even 20 minutes, can make you feel better.
- ◆ **Recognize that there are things you can change and things you have no control over** and can't change. “Public school is closed for the rest of the school year. I can't change that. But I can call 2 friends a week. Talking to them makes me feel better.”
- ◆ Remember that when you get a text from someone, unless it's an emergency, you don't have to respond right away. You can wait until the moment is right for you. It's important to set boundaries for communication (e.g., text, email, phone calls, DM's, etc.) and tasks.
- ◆ Create a **Happy Box for a Bad Day** or a **Bad Day Survival Kit** that you can pull-out and use during your crummy days. These are boxes filled with things that are designed to make you feel better when you're upset, sad, disappointed, angry, or hurt.
- ◆ Create a **Safety Plan for a Mental Health Crisis** BEFORE you or a loved one needs it. A safety plan is a document that supports and guides someone when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide, to help them avoid a state of intense suicidal crisis.
- ◆ **Build a playlist on your music app that makes you feel good** so that you can play it when you need a boost. And create a playlist of songs that make you cry, for when you need a good cry. If you could use an angry playlist, make that too!
- ◆ **Create a new social media account and just follow pages that put a smile on your face** (e.g., cute puppies or kittens, funny memes, gardening and flowers, etc.) When you need a mental health break, look at this feed. It is therapeutic and can put a smile on your face.
- ◆ **Preemptively check in with your mental health providers** and understand their telehealth platform before you need them.
- ◆ Enjoy online free concerts, free college level classes at www.udemy.com and www.coursera.org, free museum tours, book clubs, yoga classes, crafting classes, and cooking classes. If you want it, it's out there.
- ◆ It's important to be informed but not enough to be triggering. **Know when to turn media off.**
- ◆ Organizations are still around to help, even if it's just virtual. **Check out your town websites for resources,** schools/food/volunteer donations.

Helpful Information

Diana Divecha, Ph.D.: [Pandemic 2020: Will the Kids Be All Right? Lessons on Parenting from 100 Years of Crises](#)

Fast Company: [A Former Navy SEAL and a Neuroscientist Share 3 Secrets for Overcoming Coronavirus Stress](#)

FREDLA: [Resources for Talking with Children and Youth about Coronavirus](#)

McLean Hospital: [Caring for Your Mental Health Despite the Coronavirus](#)

Mindful: [Rethinking Our Self-Care During the Pandemic](#)

NAMI: [Being Socially Isolated With Mental Illness: A Perspective For Loved Ones](#)

NAMI: [Coronavirus: Mental Health Coping Strategies](#)

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health: [COVID-19 Resources for Parents, Families & Youth](#)

Psychology Today: [How We Find Resilience During Impossible Times](#)

Safety Plan: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Brown-StanleySafetyPlanTemplate.pdf>

Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research: [For Families or Caregivers: Self-Care is Putting on YOUR Oxygen Mask First](#)

HELPLINES AND SUPPORT

via phone, text, or virtually

SAMHSA Helpline

1-800-985-5990

National Suicide Prevention line

1-800-273-8255 and website:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Crisis Text Line

Text "HOME" to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor or visit <https://www.crisistextline.org>

The Trevor Project

Specializing in supporting the LGBTQ community, call 1-866-488-7386 or text "START" to 678-678

NAMI helpline

<https://www.nami.org/help>

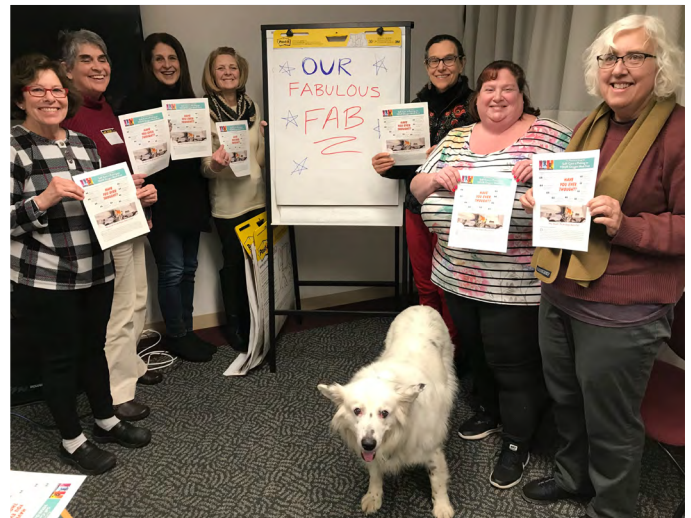
NAMI support groups

<https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Support-Groups>

Organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous

Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746



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