

## MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS TIPS FOR QUARANTINE

*From psychologist Margie Donlon, who has doctoral level Psychologist in NYS with a Psy.D. in the specialties of School and Clinical Psychology.*

1. Stick to a routine. Go to sleep and wake up at a reasonable time, write a schedule that is varied and includes time for work as well as self-care.
2. Dress for the social life you want, not the social life you have. Shower and dress in comfortable clothes – bright colors can lift your mood. Wash your face, brush your teeth, include a bath or facial sometimes.
3. Get out at least once a day, for at least 30 minutes. Going out early or later in the evening on less travelled streets can help you avoid contact with others. If you are high risk or living with those who are high risk, open the windows and blast the fan. It is amazing how much fresh air can do for spirits.
4. Find some time to move each day, for at least 30 minutes. If you don't feel comfortable going outside, there are many YouTube videos that offer free movement or yoga classes, and online dancing.
5. Reach out to others at least once daily for 30 minutes. FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, Zoom, text: whatever helps you connect with other people for mutual support. Help your children set up virtual connections as well.
6. Stay hydrated and eat well. Stress can lead us to over-indulge, forget to eat, or avoid food. Drink plenty of water, eat nutritious foods, and challenge yourself to learn how to cook something new!
7. Develop a self-care toolkit that involves all of the senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (comforting pressure). Some ideas: a soft blanket, stuffed animal, hot chocolate or tea, comforting music, lavender oil, a rocking chair, a weighted blanket, a journal, an inspiring book, a coloring book, blowing bubbles. Help children decorate a self-regulation comfort box they can use when overwhelmed.
8. Spend extra time playing with children. Children will rarely communicate how they are feeling, but will often make a bid for attention and communication through play. They may include the themes of illness, doctor visits, and isolation through play. This is a helpful way for children to process what their experience.
9. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and a wide berth. Each person will have times when they are not at their best. It is important to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges and continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.
10. Having ones own retreat space is helpful, particularly when we are confined at home with multiple people. Create separate space for work and for relaxation. Help children identify a place where they can retreat when stressed. Make it cozy by using blankets, pillows, cushions, scarves, beanbags, and "forts."
11. Expect behavioral issues in children, and respond gently. Children, rely on routines to make them feel safe. With the disruption of routines, expect increased anxiety, fears, nightmares, difficulty separating or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Do not introduce major behavioral plans or consequences at this time—focus on emotional connection, and building stability.
12. Focus on safety and attachment with children. We are working to meet many demands: work deadlines, homeschooling, running a sterile household, and playing with and caring for children at home. We can forget that these are scary and unpredictable times for children. Follow their lead in play, and reassure them through physical touch, therapeutic books, and letting them know you are there for them.
13. Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance. We are juggling many demands in a climate of fear and stress. Give yourself what psychologists call "radical self acceptance": accepting your current situation, and your efforts without question, blame, or pushback. There is no roadmap for this, and we are all doing our best in a challenging situation.

For more information or support, please contact **Heart House Hospice** by calling 905-712-8119 or visit [www.hearthousehospice.com](http://www.hearthousehospice.com)

14. There is a lot information on COVID-19 to consume, changing daily. Find a few trusted sources, and set a time limit for yourself (again 30 minutes tops, 2-3 times/day.) Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot of children, who can become frightened by what they hear.
15. Notice the good in the world, the helpers. There is a lot of scary, negative, and overwhelming information to take in regarding this pandemic. There are also a ton of stories of people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. Counter-balance the heavy with the hopeful.
16. Help others. Find ways, big and small, to give back to others. Support restaurants, offer to grocery shop, check in with elderly neighbors, write psychological wellness tips for others—helping others gives us a sense of agency when things seem out of control.
17. Find something you can control, and control the heck out of it. In moments of big uncertainty and overwhelm, control your little corner of the world. Organize your bookshelf, purge your closet. It helps to anchor and ground us when things are chaotic.
18. Find a long-term project to dive into. Now is the time to learn how to play the keyboard, put together a jigsaw puzzle, start a game of Risk, paint a picture, read the Harry Potter series, binge watch a show, crochet a blanket. Find something to keep you engaged and give you breaks from what is going on in the outside world.
19. Research has shown that repetitive movement (knitting, coloring, painting, clay sculpting, jump roping etc.) especially left-right movement (running, drumming, skating, hopping) can be effective at self-soothing and self-regulation in moments of distress.
20. Find an expressive art and go for it. Our emotional brain is very receptive to the creative arts, and it is a direct portal for release of feelings. Give your all to something creative (sculpting, drawing, dancing, music, singing, playing.) It is a very effective way of helping kids to emote and communicate as well!
21. Find lightness and humor in each day. There is a lot to be worried about. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny: YouTube cat videos; a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day.
22. Reach out for help. If you have a therapist or psychiatrist, they are likely available, even at a distance. Keep up your medications and your therapy sessions as best you can. If you don't have a therapist, there are mental health professionals to help you through this crisis. Seek support groups of fellow home-schoolers, parents, and neighbours. Connect virtually when you can't connect physically.
23. "Chunk" your quarantine, take it moment by moment. Focus on whatever bite-sized piece of a challenge that feels manageable. This can help you move through stress in pieces. Set a time stamp for how far ahead in the future you will let yourself worry.
24. Remind yourself daily that this is temporary. Though it will go on for an undetermined amount of time, it is a season of life and it will pass. We will return to feeling free, safe, busy, and connected.
25. Find the lesson. This whole crisis can seem sad and senseless. It is important to find a sense of your own agency -- what are the potential positive outcomes you can effect? What can each of us learn here, in big and small ways, from this crisis? What needs to change in ourselves, our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world?

- Margie Donlon (abridged)