



Staying Sane in a Remote Work / School world

COVID-19 survival guide, Shelter In place, in peace.
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The world is different right now, we must adjust for sanity

Like many of you, the world we see before us today looks so very different than it did just a few weeks ago. We have entire counties and states closed for the next few weeks or possibly longer. Wait... What...Excuse me... what's happening right now?? Ummm what do you mean everything is canceled, all non-essential stores are closed, and there is no Toilet Paper at the stores? When will they get more? What is essential travel again? I have work travel planned is that essential? I need to work. Is the drive-through open or not? How many people can be in one room at once? What is social distancing?

These were some of the many questions we had, that we didn't just a few weeks back. After some research from reputable sources (not just any random Twitter or Facebook posts) then we learned that everything is canceled or virtual for now, including happy hours. Drive-throughs are still open, video conferencing seems to work great, Toilet Paper is obtainable...., but you now need a strategy and the skill of a hunter, to get a roll not made of single ply sandpaper, ouch did you make this Toilet Paper with broken glass? We need to keep 6 feet away from people when out and about getting necessary supplies, well introverts this is your time to shine. We can leave the country but not be guaranteed to be allowed back cool so is that a permanent vacation then?

Ok, so we begin to adjust to our new reality. That means our dining room just became the classroom and the boardroom, but wait, it is still the dining room. How are we going to make this work? We love our families, but we also need privacy for work, focus for school, and some space away from each other from time to time. Video calls with students or important meeting are at risk of being interrupted by pool noodles to the noggin or cats knocking over the webcam and reveling we only got half-dressed today.

So how do you make sense of all this disruption and craziness when it feels like the world is upside down? How do you make the abnormal normal? How do you get the cat to stop meowing and pawing at your leg or laying on your keyboard as you try to teach science or negotiate a deal? We hope to give you some easy ways to keep yourself grounded, calm and sane during this chaotic and disruptive time in our journey as humans.

Calm is your best friend

Take a moment now to take a deep breath, I'll wait for you. Inhale through your nose..... hold it..... exhale slowly out your mouth, do it again....., one more time. See don't you already feel just the slightest bit calmer.

In a time of crises, calm must be the focus. Calm will help make everything else easier to handle.

We must demonstrate calm for the children, our elderly, and each other because let's be honest, we are all freaking out a little bit even if we are presenting a calm front. The calmer we are the easier it is to stay grounded and sane.

Golden Rule

Now more than ever we need to cut each other some slack (unless you are coughing on everything). We are stressed and so are the people around us, not only those stuck indoors with us but also those around us virtually: students, colleagues and family members.

So now is the time to show grace, understanding, calm, and patience. Practice the Golden Rule. Do unto other as you would want done to you, in other words treat people they same way you want to be treated. Treat them with kindness, understanding, and compassion. You will feel better and so will they.

Practice Gratitude

Working and living in close quarters with family members can start to feel overwhelming. Remember, keep your communications positive and uplifting. Research data on human relationships from John and Mary Gottman at the University of Washington indicates that in order to maintain positive, long-term relationships you should strive for a minimum of five positive interactions to each negative interaction.

One way to build positive interactions into your day is to recognize and appreciate the members of your household for their daily accomplishments and contributions. Taking the time to be thankful for others and for what you have will ease anxiety and strengthen relationships.

Routine will ground you

All the craziness of the world aside we have jobs to do, school to attend, and houses to run so how on Earth are we going to do that when we are on top of each other and schedules are hectic and sporadic? How do we succeed when we find ourselves making conference calls from the closet because it's the only peace and quiet, we can find? Try your hardest to maintain your normal daily routines, morning, afternoon and evening.

It all starts with routine and humans are creatures of routine and habit. The current situation facing all of us has disrupted our habits and routines, so we must now form new ones to stay balanced.

Planning your day

Having as normal of a schedule for your day as possible will contribute to less stress and some type of normalcy in this unusual time. Here are some tips for keeping a plan for your day:

Set a schedule and keep to it, schedules help you to maintain a routine, they will also help you to maintain separation between the various roles, work time, school time and family time.

Just like you have done your entire adult life, you get up for work at a time, you get the kids ready for school, pack lunches walk the dog, etc. don't stop keep doing the same routine as close as you can, given the current restrictions on our daily life's.

Planning tips

1. Get up on time (you know when your day starts, same time it did 3 weeks ago)
2. Shower! and get ready for your day as you normally would. While bed head bingo is fun, PJ's are not professional dress for the office or school.
3. After grooming and dressing for a workday or school day, settle into your place for school / work. (Having a dedicated place will help with focus and separation of roles).
4. You have on many hats now in the same space, plan to give time to each and take time to transition between roles.
5. Use free productivity tools to assist with various tasks you must get done.
 - a. Trello is a great way to manage day to day tasks <https://trello.com/en-US>
 - b. Google calendar <https://calendar.google.com/>
 - c. Evernote <https://evernote.com/>
6. Take breaks and walk away, go outside, leave the room, stand up and stretch.
7. When doing school or work stay focused on the task at hand, try to limit distractions, use headphones, and set boundaries and ground rules with those in your household.
8. Embrace that things will happen or go wrong, even with the best plans.

Finding space

If your home setting allows, try your best to create separate school and work areas away from the shared family areas, kitchen, dining, and family rooms. This will help with the separation of the roles we have as family member, student, parent, employee. Now that we wear all hats at once, it is SO important to find space and time for our roles and ourselves.

Structure and designated space are key. There are physiological effects from space and separation of areas space and separation of areas has a profound impact on how we deal with this isolation, while fulfilling many of our roles at once.

Find any place you can, the garage, a closet, the porch, the corner of the living room, no matter where you decide to make your space, make sure to setup ground rules for the space. During work time it is a place of work. During school time it is a place of learning. Respect that space and its purpose at the time.

Secure your space, talking about sensitive company business next to the smart speaker during the kid's math class probably shouldn't be happening in the same space. Be mindful of web camera use and what is being shown in the background, taking a call from your bedroom with unmentionables hanging from the bed post should be avoided. Also, some of us have questionable tastes so be sure to avoid displaying things in your background that could be inflammatory or be a trigger for someone. Example even though your grandfather gave you that Nazi flag from WWII and you're proud of his sacrifice, maybe it's not the best background for a work or school call.

Boundaries will save you

Having a dedicated space for work or school will help you to maintain some separation and focus. Working from the same couch as you Netflix from may prove difficult as you will tend to confuse the two roles. This can result in either not focusing on work and being distracted by the temptations of entertainment, or not being able to relax and enjoy leisure time because that space has been tainted by work.

Plan for physical transitions between spaces to support the different roles you have including person, parent, spouse, employee, etc. If possible designate areas in your home for work and school such as less used areas in the home or corners of rooms can work in a pinch for school and work time, this will help you maintain the separation necessary to keep it from all bleeding together. If possible, try schooling or working from outdoors on the porch, the fresh air does wonders for your brain.

Set expectations with family members about school and work boundaries for when our family members are trying to remain focused.

Sleep will heal you

Let's all take a moment to be honest with ourselves, when we lack proper sleep we are at our worst as humans—crabby, cranky and generally unpleasant to be around. Sleep is important to health and calm in the home (as children we fear the nap, as adults we embrace it). Maintaining a regular sleep schedule will assist in keeping you balanced and at your best.

- **Sleep is the best thing** you can do for the mental health of yourself and family.
- A lack of sleep can make it more difficult to handle emotions and make you more reactive.
- Sleep heals us and helps to keep our immune systems strong.

Empathy will bring calm and sanity

Showing empathy to each other will bring calm and understanding to any situation, empathy is putting yourself in the other persons shoes, and asking yourself, "If I were in the same situation, how would I behave?"

You can demonstrate empathy toward others by listening, really listening, to them. This includes listening to what they have to say without thinking about what you're going to say, without trying to fix anything, and without trying to minimize it or put a positive spin on it. Just listen. This includes listening to the silence. Practice being comfortable with silence and don't jump to fill it.

If someone needs to cry, let them cry. Offer them a shoulder to cry on. Place a box of tissues within easy reaching distance. Above all, don't shove tissues at a crying person. Shoving tissues at someone indicates you are uncomfortable with their tears and is a non-verbal message to stop crying. Crying is actually very healthy. Tears release excess stress hormones including cortisol. If someone needs to cry, let them.

Grooving and Moving

Working and schooling at home presents new challenges as there is less movement than if we were at our Schools or offices. Normally we must move from classroom to classroom or meeting to meeting, taking time to walk away from the work/school area, can alleviate stress and help us to disconnect for a minute. Stand up desks can provide relief from sitting in chair all day, working from home can sometimes increase the number of hours worked so be mindful to take frequent breaks and move around.

Spontaneous dance parties can be a great way to relieve stress and gain some grounding, our species for many years has been tied to movements and dance. Some silly spins around the kitchen can make all the difference in how you feel about your day. Maybe dancing is not your thing, go outside and take a walk, pace the back yard, roam the apartment, do whatever you can to get plenty of movement in your day. Taking time to get up and move, is a core part of good health and stress relief.

Regular physical activity is shown to reduce stress, and helps with cabin fever https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabin_fever something us Minnesotans know plenty about!

Staying social

Make a list of people to connect with and give yourself goals about how many people you will connect with each day. If your first answer is, "I don't know anybody", start going through your social media connections, work colleagues, etc. You know a lot of people, guaranteed. Make a list, come up with an action plan that includes when and how you will reach out to them, and connect with someone every day.

If you're not sure what to do to connect consider options like virtual coffee meetings,

The important thing is to be intentional and schedule your connection times.

Calming conflict at home

Take a deep breath and listen to yourself. Ask yourself “what is bothering me at this moment?” And, “is my reaction in proportion to the situation?” “Am I overreacting?”

Make agreements about how to interact with each other while at home for long periods of time. What are your ground rules for household interactions? You have ground rules and expectations at school and at work. Have you set ground rules and expectations for home?

Start your sentences with “I” statements. Own your own feelings. Here’s the formula, “When I am _____, I feel _____.” Or, “I feel _____ when X happens.” Here’s how this works. “I feel very claustrophobic when I don’t have at least 15 minutes by myself at the end of the day.” This is a much better approach than, “You never give me any space.” Starting a sentence with “you” will immediately make the listener defensive and cause them to stop listening.

Think before you speak. Here are three great questions to ask yourself before you say anything:

- Does it need to be said?
- Does it need to be said **right now**?
- Does it need to be said by me?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, pause and give yourself time and space before you address the topic.

Mental health, keeping it together in a crisis.

One of the basic and unchanging facts of life is that crises happen, and we have no control over them. What we can control is how we choose to respond to each crisis. Ever wonder why some people handle crisis better than others? They have developed resilience. Resilience is the ability to handle disruptive change and bounce back from setbacks.

Resilient people make specific choices about how they respond to a crisis. They don’t blow up. They don’t collapse. They don’t consider themselves the victim. They don’t complain about being stressed. Instead, they identify disruptive change as a challenge to be overcome or a tough workout. And, here’s the great news. They can be you.

Positive psychology researchers have demonstrated that resilience is a skill that can be developed and strengthened over time. Don’t feel that you’re particularly resilient? Now is the time to start building your resilience. While whole books are written on this subject, for example “The Resiliency Advantage” by Al Siebert, Ph.D., here are a few simple steps to get you started.

First, take a few minutes to identify crises you've been through in the past. What did you do to successfully navigate these events? What did you learn? Second, take anything you learned from previous events and ask yourself; how can I use what I learned in the past to get through this current challenge. Finally, make a commitment to cope well with the situation. The facts of quarantines, self-isolation, etc. won't change. What you can change is how you chose to respond to the situation.

Things to do at home when not working/schooling.

- Virtually socialize
- Repair projects
- Learning a new skill
- Reading
- Playing board games
- Cooking
- Spring cleaning
- Playing video games
- Listening to music
- Playing music
- Learning a new language
- Puzzles
- Make plans.
- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2020/03/16/coronavirus-quarantine-100-things-do-while-trapped-inside/5054632002/>
- <https://www.scarymommy.com/fun-things-to-do-at-home/>
- <https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/fun-things-to-do-at-home-35003444>

Have fun and laugh.

It has been said that laughter is the best medicine, We at SecurityStudio tend to agree. Whether it is bad dad jokes, virtual happy hours, comedy specials or the treasure trove of internet memes, finding ways to laugh and let off some pressure helps with the cabin fever and tension, it also has many health benefits including improving your immune system! <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

Did you hear the joke about the germ? Never mind, I don't want to spread it around.