A self-care guide during COVID-19

The stressful situations and changes we are collectively experiencing can negatively impact our thinking, emotions, behavior, and even physical sensations. When we worry, these effects are amplified as our minds respond, filling in uncertainty with worst case scenarios, preventing us from improving our mood or taking more productive action. The strategies below can help you avoid worrying and redirect your attention to more beneficial efforts.

Structure your day

Creating a routine gives us a sense of normalcy and purpose, while helping us to be more productive and feel more in control.

Protect time for self-care activities

Schedule work breaks, consistent bedtimes and wake ups, and time for leisure and fun hobbies.

Limit substances that worsen mental and physical health

Let your values guide self-care

How you care for yourself is best guided by what really matters to you in life, i.e. your values such as quality sleep, physical activity, and good nutrition.

Ask yourself, "What are 3 things that give my life meaning and purpose?" Then, choose activities that bring you closer to those values. For example, if friendship is a top value, you might prioritize daily outreach to friends via phone call or text.

Look at the big picture

It's natural to focus on the negatives during times of stress, but that can obscure reasons for hope or gratitude. Reflect on finding meaning in your situation and what you're grateful for daily.

Consider others who may not be as fortunate and how you can use your advantages to help others.

Choose acceptance

Observing and accepting what's happening in your mind and body can help us struggle less and move forward more easily and effectively than attempting to rid ourselves of unwanted thoughts and feelings.

In a quiet space, take a few minutes to notice your thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. The goal isn't to change your experience, but to simply observe it.

Acknowledge what's happening within you by labeling it (e.g. "I'm feeling anxious" or "I'm having worry thoughts.")

Steer away from judgments like"good" or "bad", "right" or "wrong". The purpose is to notice your experience with gentle curiosity and openness.

Avoid "thinking traps"

Thinking traps can lead us to catastrophize and underestimate our ability to cope. When your mood dips or anxiety rises, notice the thoughts going through your mind and ask yourself:

- Does this thought help me problem solve or prepare better?
- Does this thought give me a healthier perspective?
- Does this thought improve my mood?

If your answer to these questions is "no", the thought is likely unhelpful. Turn your attention toward more productive or positive thoughts and activities.

Consider a media break

If you consistently notice worsened mood or anxiety after viewing news or social media, and you don't otherwise benefit from those activities, reduce the frequency and amount of time spent engaged with those outlets daily.