Psychology Wellbeing Tips for Self-Isolation

This is a very strange, uncertain and difficult time for us all. We have tried to pull together this worksheet to try to support you on tips and advice if you are currently self-isolating, or will be in the future.

Adapting to social isolation can be the hardest challenge. It can take between 3-10 days to adjust to a new situation. So prepare yourself for the first week being the most difficult, knowing that things should start to improve as the new situation becomes more normalised.

Search for the positives. Looking for any positives you can find, e.g. having a garden, having wifi, living in a country that has an NHS system, it is not a world war situation, having enough toilet roll (!)

This too shall pass. Nothing is forever.

Routine is the best and most important way of coping. Building a structure every day is vital, and you can even plan each day, hour by hour, e.g. 8am-wake up, 9am-exercise, 10am-speak to family or friends, 11am-learn a new skill, etc.

Coping with boredom and monotony. This will likely set in at some point during self-isolation. We are lucky to live in a world with access to a number of entertainment platforms from streaming media, listening to podcasts, having video chats with family and friends, to gaming platforms. However, it's important to have variety, and long term use of screens isn't always great for our wellbeing. It is helpful to engage in creative pursuits and hobbies, e.g. reading books, listening to music, playing card games, and cooking food. It is also very important to build exercise into your routine, e.g. doing a keep fit video, an online yoga class, skipping in the house, doing star jumps. Relaxation practices are also really important during this stressful time e.g. meditation, visualisation, or breathing practices.

Reduce feelings of uncertainty. The uncertainty of not knowing what lies ahead can cause anxiety. Try to turn off the news or limit watching to only once a day rather than constantly checking. Staying in the present moment can be really helpful, not thinking about the future, living each day as it comes. A meditation practice can be really helpful with this, there are lot of meditations available online, here is a link with some to choose from: https://www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness/audio/index.php.en

Focusing on **small achievements and acknowledging progress** can help keep up morale and stay motivated. Feeling low in mood or struggling with motivation may come and go throughout the isolation phase. Little wins can help with this, and having celebratory meals can be a nice occasion, whether you share this with people you are living with, or via video calling (e.g. zoom meetings). Celebrations can be to celebrate a milestone, or occasion (e.g. birthday, each week on a Saturday/Sunday).

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Finding a sense of purpose, such as completing projects, taking online courses, working from home, learning skills can help provide focus and stay motivated. Write a list of things you have been wanting to do that you haven't had time to do, e.g. learn to bake bread, do a painting, learn a language, make some music, do some sewing, clean out a cupboard, or change your room around.

Staying in contact with friends and family over phone calls, messaging and/ or video calls. This can be very powerful. However, the content of what we speak about can affect our mood and morale, it can be helpful to decide what topics you would and would not like to discuss. The same can apply for social media. You can use the 'mute' button when you want to control what is seen and when.

Keeping a journal, on paper, online, or by video – can help people process their experiences and create a sense of order in what can otherwise feel like a chaotic time.

And most importantly, staying hopeful. A report from a London man living in Shanghai, China;

'While life is not yet normal here, the situation has drastically improved since the start of the outbreak. The city is re-opening for business, and the days are getting warmer and sunnier. People are outside again trying to enjoy the breaths of fresh air after nearly two months of isolation. Restaurants are opening for brunch and dinner, and it was the first time I had seen my group of friends for two months — there is light at the end of the tunnel.'

Being in isolated in confined settings and in close proximity with the same people for long periods of time can be stressful. **Identifying an area of personal space,** a place where you can retreat to in times of frustration, can be helpful.

Have open and honest conversations if people are upsetting you and resolve the problem before it leads to further tension and potential arguments.

This too shall pass. Nothing is forever.

(Smith & Barratt, 2020, The Psychologist)