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**Southern Ohio Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  Menu  
*Stronger and Better Together:  
Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World*

Complete Story

03/19/2020

## Surviving the COVID-19 pandemic with your mental health intact

This is a two-part series on how to keep yourself and others mentally healthy during this time of high-stress and social/physical isolation. Jody Passafume was a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for 32 years and has a Masters' Degree in Counseling. She is a member of Holy Trinity, Columbus and has graciously agreed to share her expertise and wisdom on the subject. Part one of this series focuses on how to keep yourself mentally healthy.

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### Surviving the COVID-19 pandemic with your mental health intact

Let's face it: Humans are social beings. Some more than others; but even the most devout introverts require human interaction on a regular basis. The concept of social distancing is not our friend and certainly not our mental health friend! Here are some thoughts on how to survive the Covid-19 pandemic with your mental health intact.

#### Develop a routine

Just like comfort food, routine is the comfort food for the mind. Develop a new routine based on your risk factors and recommended CDC guidelines. Routine does not mean "rigid." It does imply a regular series of patterns one might engage in most every day. Slow down your morning and nighttime routines. Maybe add a step or two you have always wished you had the time to take. Be mindful of your selfcare and relish in it.

#### Tackle a project or learn something new

Throughout the remainder of the day, get creative! Make a working list of all those tasks and projects you've been putting off for months and years. Now is a great time to dig into them and possibly spend more time than you originally expected you would be able to. Lists are also like food to mental health—it feels so good when you cross something off! Our new normal can allow time to learn and perfect that hobby you have been wanting to start forever. Need a lesson? Check out YouTube or have someone verbally walk you through the steps you need.

### **Alternate activity types**

Plan to alternate sedentary activities with more physically active ones. Vow to get up off the couch after each episode of your binge watching: 10 minutes of activity for every hour of inactivity. You have been told for years the mind, body, and spirit cannot be separated. It's true! Each aspect feeds and enhances the others. Likewise, the mind prefers a variety of engagement. Different areas of the brain are stimulated by different activities. Keep that in mind when setting up your routine. Switch from primarily visual activities to ones primarily auditory to ones primarily tactile and so forth. Alternate between crossword puzzles and numerical puzzles; between reading and writing letters (remember that skill?); between cooking for enjoyment and playing an instrument. Sing! It has been proven to increase brain chemicals which contribute to a positive mental health.

### **Battle anxiety with mindfulness**

Addressing anxiety requires persistent mindfulness to constantly challenge the productivity of your "busy brain." Each time you find yourself ruminating on something out of your control, actively and repeatedly remind yourself spending energy processing things beyond your control only drains your ability to remain mentally healthy. Use distraction, activity requiring concentration, and self-talk to calm your anxiety-feeding thoughts.

Additional thoughts for those diagnosed with depression: if you believe your current medication regimen is not maintaining your healthy levels, contact your doctor's office (preferably without going in!) and discuss the possibility of increasing your dosage or adding an enhancer temporarily until this crisis abates.

### **Look outward, not just inward**

Think of others! Feelings of depression are lightened by both a sense of accomplishment and a sense of helping others. Going to the grocery store? Check in with an elderly neighbor, relative, or congregational member to see if they need you to pick something up for them. Take precautions when dropping off their order. Write them a letter and mail it or stick it in their mailbox. Rake a yard. Go

dance in front of their window. Deliver medication. Make a meal. Sing them a song over the phone. Paint them a picture. Walk their dog. FaceTime. Skype. There are endless possibilities that will help them and help you!

Look for a follow up story on Saturday on what to look for in others who may become depressed or suicidal during this pandemic crisis and how you can help. As with all of our synod communications you are encouraged to share this information with your congregation, family and friends. Please credit the source of the story to the Southern Ohio Synod.

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