

# Therapists Offer Tips for Surviving the (Expanded) Stay-at-Home Order

By Ronelle Grier - 04/16/2020 8:00 AM



*Margo Rosenthal of West Bloomfield keeps up with her yoga practice with online classes. (Claudia Drilich)*

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Novel coronavirus. COVID-19. Self-quarantine. Social distancing.

These previously unfamiliar phrases have become part of our daily vocabulary.

While people who are ill with the virus are most profoundly affected, life has also changed dramatically for those in healthy households.

Children are schooling at home. Adults are working from home. We are no longer visiting elderly parents and grandparents, fearful of spreading a disease we may unknowingly carry. The meetings, group events and happenings that normally fill our business and personal lives are taking place remotely or not at all.

The past few weeks, the primary focus has been caring for the sick and slowing the spread of the virus. However, many people are realizing that COVID-19 is taking a toll on their mental health.

Local psychotherapists are seeing a lot of patients dealing with increased anxiety. The pervasive uncertainty about when the virus will go away has exacerbated these feelings for individuals with pre-existing anxiety issues.

“Some fears are not based on reality, but this is real,” says Judy Lipson, a West Bloomfield-based psychotherapist who believes in paying attention to the body as well as the mind. “Worry is in the mind, stress is in the body and anxiety is when they’re both present.”

Movement can help dispel anxiety, Lipson adds.

“Emotions get trapped in your body as energy, and motions move emotions, allowing energy to move through your body,” she says.

### **The APPLE Technique**

“The demon of anxiety is what makes people imagine the absolute worst and believe it will happen,” says Dr. Toni Kaplan, a Farmington Hills-based psychotherapist.

To help clients combat anxiety, she uses the APPLE technique:

**A: Acknowledge** feelings of fear and uncertainty without judgment.

**P: Pause** and take a deep breath instead of reacting. Repeat.

**P: Pull back** and realize it’s your worry that is talking.

**L: Let go** of the thought or feeling. Imagine it floating away in a bubble or cloud.

**E: Explore** the present moment, noticing your breathing and your surroundings. Then go back to what you were doing before the anxiety surfaced.

### **Upside of Slowing Down**

For better or worse, life has slowed down. We’ve stopped rushing from one activity to the next. Lipson encourages people to consider the benefits of moving at a slower pace.

“How often do we say, ‘If only life were simpler?’ Well, now it is simpler. Use this as an opportunity to slow down and reflect and reconnect with yourself and others,” she says.

She suggests practicing mindfulness, focusing on the present moment instead of worrying about the future.

“If you’re cleaning the counter or vacuuming, focus only on that,” says Lipson, who also recommends meditation and deep breathing to relieve anxiety. “The breath is the great reboot for the body.”

### **Co-existing in Close Quarters**

Spending 24 hours a day under the same roof with children and spouses can result in a feeling of “too much togetherness.” Mental health professionals recommend establishing boundaries within your household. Carve out “alone time” or establish “no interruption” hours for work or self-care activities such as exercise or meditation.

“Take care of yourselves,” Kaplan says. “If your husband doesn’t do yoga and you do, then do your yoga.”

Couples whose relationships were shaky before the pandemic may find their problems exacerbated.

“Use this as an opportunity to set aside the way you have looked at your partner before, and focus on figuring out how you will get through these times with respect and fairness, if not with love and affection,” suggests Janice Goldfein, a Farmington Hills-based therapist.

For those who live alone, using Skype or other video chat apps to keep in touch with friends and family can ease feelings of isolation. Walking outdoors and greeting neighbors (from a safe distance) is also beneficial.

Giving back to others helps combat depression and self-pity. Call an elderly relative or neighbor. Clean out a closet, and fill a bag to donate to a local charity. If possible, contribute to an organization that helps those who are struggling financially.

“Take a look around,” Kaplan advises. “What is in your control? Find things that are soothing — petting a dog, talking to loved ones, listening to music. It’s OK to acknowledge these are not easy times.”

## **Coronavirus Coping Tips**

Suggestions for maintaining mental and emotional well-being from therapists Judy Lipson, Toni Kaplan and Janice Goldfein:

- Make a schedule for yourself and your kids. A lack of structure can promote anxiety; a daily agenda helps alleviate stress.
- Get outside. Walking or riding a bicycle are excellent antidotes to cabin fever.
- Exercise indoors with free online yoga and exercise classes.
- Limit your intake of television news. Stay informed, but avoid over-consuming the news.
- Get dressed every day, even if you're not leaving the house.
- Eat well. Nosh on fruits, veggies and nuts instead of junk food. Cook healthy meals.
- Use an online app to practice daily meditation. Even 5 minutes helps calm the mind and reduce anxiety.
- Stay connected to friends and family via phone, Skype or other video apps.
- Use unexpected free time for neglected projects. Read one of the books on your list, organize digital photos or declutter the basement or garage.
- Try something new. Write a poem, draw a picture, learn a new language or create some dance steps for your favorite song.
- Practice gratitude. Notice and appreciate the things that are right in your world.

## **Resources for Mental Health**

A comprehensive list of community resources for mental health and other types of assistance is available on the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit website, [jewishdetroit.org/covid19resources](https://jewishdetroit.org/covid19resources).

Most local synagogues are offering free online worship services and other programs for members as well as the general community. Visit their websites for details.

Friendship Circle of Michigan is providing virtual programs for children with special needs and their families. Visit their FC Goes Virtual Facebook page: [tinyurl.com/snhubc5](https://tinyurl.com/snhubc5).

Jewish recovery meetings normally held at Friendship House are now taking place via Zoom. Email [bluma@friendshipcircle.org](mailto:bluma@friendshipcircle.org) to receive a link.

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