

Keeping Balanced When Life Feels Upside Down

In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we often feel off-balance, even knocked down, by the rapidly changing pace of daily life. As our sense of security decreases, it's natural for our stress, anxieties and fear to increase. We know how to keep ourselves and others physically safe, but what can we do to keep ourselves emotionally and spiritually upright when everything seems turned upside down?

Good mental health care focuses on understanding what is in our control and channeling what is not. Worry and anxieties are real, but they are just thoughts; we have control of our thoughts and can push worry out of our heads. With COVID-19, we can limit news consumption, separate what's fact from speculation, and distinguish between what's happening locally from other parts of the world. We need to remember that the current restrictions do not mean we have reached an intolerable situation; they are attempts to prevent that from happening. Share feelings, but don't ruminate, dwelling for a long period of time on the same train of thought. Find healthy outlets such as journaling, physical movement and, most of all, turning to God.

Keeping structure or routine provides a sense of stability. Having regular times for waking, eating, working/school, relaxing, praying and sleeping creates a pattern to the day and reduces boredom, distress from constant decision making, anxiety and depression. Virtually or spiritually participate in our parish or diocesan Masses.

Now's the time to tackle that project that's been waiting to get done! Maybe it's cleaning out junk drawers, learning a new skill, or working on photo albums. Focusing on something concrete provides not only a distraction from worry, but also a feeling of control and accomplishment when other things in our lives seem so uncertain. Listening to inspirational music lifts spirits and makes tasks more enjoyable.

We have officially entered Spring, and the days are warmer and lighter. Opening a window, listening to a chirping bird, or going for a walk and looking for signs of the earth's rebirth restores our well-being of body, mind and spirit. Breathe in God's goodness and beauty.

We also need to keep connected. Social distancing does not mean social isolation. We can turn this around to do "distance socializing." Using social media, making phone calls, or engaging in safe-distance conversations is important to others as well as ourselves. Remember the smile in getting a "thinking of you" card in the mail? Pass it on and include a favorite scripture of hope.

Embrace enjoyment: try a new recipe, read, play games, google funny cat videos. Find things that bring laughter and joy - then share. Challenge yourself every day to do even a small act of kindness. Practice gratitude by thanking God for the gift of a new day and name three blessings in your evening prayers.

While there are countless ways to maintain balance in our lives, we need to avoid the things that might feel good in the moment, but have negative impacts. Limit alcohol consumption, overindulgence in comfort foods, excessive use of TV or video games and other ways to numb or escape reality. Tensions will rise, irritability increase and anger flare. Don't take these emotions out on yourself or others, and be tolerant as others may channel anxiety in these ways. Practice times of bestowing "grace and space." If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek resources such as the Four County Crisis Line at 320-253-5555, texting TALK to 741741, or calling the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

We're in this together; with God as our guide, we will turn the world right-side up again.

~ Roxann Storms, MSW, LICSW
Holy Spirit Pastoral Associate