

So You're Stuck At Home During a Pandemic

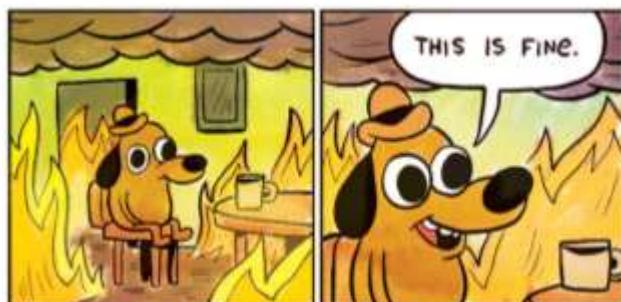
So there you are, minding your own business, just trying to get by, when along comes a pandemic to introduce chaos into your life. So now you've been asked to stay home to work or study, and you're wondering: how worried should I be? What should I do next?

Step 1: Don't panic.



Okay, so this is easier said than done. Still, it's good to remember that while there is a problem out in the world, odds are you've been asked to stay home to help "[flatten the curve](#)", help the healthcare system keep up, and protect those vulnerable to the bug, not because you personally are at any significant risk. You're doing a good deed for others right now!

Step 2: Don't be blasé about it either!



Confused? This is a good example of a [dialectic](#); two sides which seem to be in opposition but work best when considered together. While panicking will not help, neither will pretending that everything is okay and going about life as usual. If you've been asked to stay home, there's a strong likelihood that it will be in everyone's best interest if you take that seriously. That means no going clubbing just because you think drinks will be cheap tonight!

Step 3: Take steps to protect your mental health.

Quarantine during pandemic outbreaks has long been known to be a stressful event that can have long term consequences for those isolated (please see [this link](#) for some examples). You have three main challenges: the sense of isolation and loneliness, boredom, and just too darn much time to think and stress about events outside your control!



Challenge 1: Isolation and loneliness.

This one is easier to tackle in today's heavily connected world. Pick up the phone and call people you care about, as well as those whom you'd just normally be interacting with on a day-to-day basis (assuming you actually *like* those people!) Video chatting is best if you can manage it; voice calls are second best. Maintaining a sense of normalcy and keeping up with most aspects of your typical routine, including people you normally enjoy chatting with, will help with this as well.

Now, while everyone is likely to have the big bad bug on the brain, do remember to take time to talk about things besides the pandemic! Chat about that series you're binging on Netflix, those movies you're finally getting to see, or the new house project you finally have time to work on. If you have family members in the home with you, this would be a good time to play with some ways to keep each other entertained and connected. One example is this [14 day class](#) from the Purpose Built Families foundation, available free of charge, to help couples have meaningful conversations and to connect during this challenging time.

Bonus Challenge: Are you cooped up with a partner, children, or roommates? Rather than being isolated, you might feel like you can't get any personal space! Just remember to find a corner somewhere, to negotiate "time off" if you're a parent, and to get a little alone time. Headphones are great for creating a personal bubble to enjoy all on your own!

Challenge 2: Boredom!

The name of the game here is to find lots of fun and engaging things to do while stuck at home! And don't be shy about being stuck inside; if you have an outdoor space, get outside and do something! Try your hand at gardening or lawn games if the weather is nice enough, or just hang out and enjoy the weather and open spaces. Go for a walk, run, or bike ride - just remember to maintain that 6 feet of distance from others doing the same!

If the weather isn't cooperating, find fun things to do inside. Break out that [board game](#) you haven't touched in years, try a new [video game](#), or pick up [that book](#) you've been meaning to read. If you have a chance to pick up supplies, don't just get groceries and toilet paper - grab a new game, puzzle, [craft](#), or book. Our minds are healthiest and happiest when we have something to do that's fun and/or productive and meaningful.

Challenge 3: Too much time to think!

As many of us know all too well, our minds can often be our own worst enemies: conjuring up worst case scenarios for us and those we care most about, criticizing everything and anything we do, and even criticizing us for how we react. This is a great time to practice skills for handling unwanted thoughts and feelings. For example, [radical acceptance](#) and [mindfulness of thoughts](#) can be useful skills for helping to let go of unhelpful thoughts, focusing on your values, and focusing on what you can do to actively cope with a difficult situation. (For those unfamiliar with the Monsters on the Bus or The Unwanted Party Guest metaphors, follow [this link](#) and [this link](#) to see some helpful illustrations of why it's useful to accept unwanted thoughts and feelings).



REMEMBER YOUR MIND IS A MASTER STORYTELLER
IT JUST WANTS YOUR ATTENTION, IT DOESN'T CARE
IF WHAT IT IS TELLING YOU IS HELPFUL

The Happiness Trap
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Illustrations by Louise Gardner

If you get really stuck and you're finding you're trapped in an anxiety spiral, there are a number of apps and games that can help you pull out of the spiral. And remember, it's never too late to pull up! [Here](#) is an example of a game designed to guide you through caring for yourself under stressful circumstances.

Step 4: Rinse and repeat!

As the situation is likely to continue for longer than any of us would like, plan on revisiting any and all of these steps as needed! Your feelings, reactions, thoughts, and struggles are highly likely to evolve and change as the quarantine goes on. Don't be ashamed of needing to revisit any and all helpful supports, links, handouts, or websites as many times as you need to. This is a great time to practice non-judgmentalness of the self - you feel how you feel, so work towards accepting yourself and your feelings. And don't forget to just take each day one at a time!



THIS TOO
SHALL PASS.

IT MIGHT PASS
LIKE A KIDNEY
STONE.
but it will pass.