

From a prominent local psychologist:

"Friends- I'm not an expert on viruses or pandemics, but I am an expert on anxiety, depression, and grief. If you have a therapist, it may not be easy to see them right now and if you don't have one, it's probably even harder to find one. So, here are some suggestions for these unusual times...

1. I think we're finally done seeing the "Don't Panic" suggestions...thank goodness! It's garbage advice and I'm sure all my mental health colleagues were rolling their eyes and cringing right along with me. My suggestion is to feel however you feel. But know your feelings are closely tied to your thoughts and behaviors. You control the latter two, which leads to...

2. You don't control the virus. You don't control school closings. It's not helpful to focus energy on those. Control what's in your control. That includes how you spend your time, what media you consume and how much you consume, what you eat, what you drink, if you get dressed or stay in pajamas, if you exercise, and your attitude (are you complaining, focusing on only you?). Take it one day at a time. Try to keep your focus on what you can do today. Anxiety builds when we start focusing on all the unknowns and 'what ifs' of the future. We can't do tomorrow today, so focus on your actions for today.

3. Do something for someone else. This can be anything. Share a list of favorite books (I saw a friend do this), share resources, buy gift cards...whatever. It feels good to be helpful. Also, ask for help if you need help with something.

4. Write down three things every day for which you are grateful. E.g., having a paycheck, having healthcare, being healthy, your pets...anything big or small.

5. Exercise, journal, meditate, go for a walk....do the things. You know what they are. They work. There is lots of evidence showing how well they work, so do them. 100% in your control. Time (no matter the situation) is a gift. How you spend it directly impacts your state of mind and mental health.

6. Find a balance between staying informed and inundating yourself with media all day. Be mindful of what you consume and how it makes you feel. You won't miss anything if you unplug for a while.

7. No one is asking you to really homeschool you kids at this point. All the memes are funny and add levity, but really just pause for a moment. Individual students will be affected differently I imagine, but we're all in the same boat here. Do your best. Reframe the situation...the kids have an opportunity to learn self-structure, self-discipline, and a little grit. These skills will take them pretty far. I've given my kids daily to-do lists that include

checking in with their teachers, reading, math, exercise, instrument practice, and chores. We've also had time to watch Shawshank Redemption and A Time to Kill, which resulted in some pretty good discussion. So, think outside the box. Education and learning happens everywhere. And if you're a SCASD parent, go ahead and add the teachers and administration to your gratitude list. They're doing a hell of a job.

8. Grief is normal for adults and kids. The reality is things like senior proms are probably going to be cancelled. Some things can be rescheduled, while some are lost forever. Go ahead and grieve. We've had several appointments and events cancelled. It sucks. It's ok to be sad, mad, etc. Also know this grief is atypical in that most losses will be experienced by an entire cohort. The universality will help. Also let it wake you up a bit to things you may have taken for granted. Next time you get to go to baseball practice, make every rep count. Most of us will do that for a while and then we'll stop. Try to remember how this unique time felt and see if we can appreciate for a little longer.

9. Nightly family check-ins. We're checking on how everyone is feeling, what they did that day, and what their plans are for the next day. Pretty simple most nights, but keeping communication open.

That's all for now. Hang in there folks!