Mental Health Amid COVID-19
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It is always important to take care of yourself mentally and physically, but with the COVID-19 pandemic and all the changes it has thrust upon us, it is even more important to be aware of and practice good self-care.

What is self-care? Self-care is anything you do that helps fill you up, restores some energy, or brings about pleasant or helpful thoughts and feelings. Some examples include taking a walk, deep breathing, having a bath, journaling, painting, dancing, talking to a friend, yoga, reading a book- I think you get the idea. There are hundreds of ways to self-care, and a lot of them are simple and free. The only thing they cost is a little bit of time and self awareness. YouTube is a great resource for self-care routines. There you can find work outs, yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and mindfulness exercises. There are helpful apps that you can download onto your phone or tablet: Breath to Relax, Virtual Hope Box, Happify, and SuperBetter are a few. Now is a great time to experiment to find out what works best for you.

Once you have a few self-care practices in your toolbox, make a commitment to yourself that you will take time and make time to practice it. You will practice self-care for your own well-being and for the well-being of those you care for and interact with. Make self-care a daily or weekly practice and you will begin to see a difference in your life.

Here are a few tips for staying at home and staying healthy during the pandemic.

1. **Follow a routine**- Structure adds a comfort to our days which can feel pretty chaotic right now. Make a schedule for yourself and your family. Be sure to be flexible and add in down time and time for self-care.

2. **Go outside**- Just because we have to stay at home doesn't mean we have to stay *inside* our home. Sit on the porch, take a walk, let the sun shine on your face. That Vitamin D makes a world of difference! While you are out, take some deep breaths of fresh air and think of something you can be thankful for.

3. **Practice gratitude**- Positive thoughts make a huge difference in our physical and mental health. You can keep a gratitude journal, make a gratitude jar, or even set an alarm on your phone that says "Be thankful" to remind you to think of something positive.

4. **Get moving**- Exercise is not only beneficial physically, but it increases the "happy chemicals" in the brain to help us feel better mentally as well. You can find a lot of videos on youtube to follow along with from yoga to walking to biking. Find something the whole family can do together and add it to your schedule for the day. Here is one that my kids and I enjoy.

5. **Get relaxing**- There are so many ways to relax- take a hot bath, progressive muscle relaxation, gentle yoga, deep breathing- I could go on and on. Try out a few relaxation techniques and give yourself the time to do them! (YouTube is a great resource for relaxation as well as exercise.)

6. **Be kind to yourself**- What you say to yourself matters. Give yourself some grace as you transition to working from or staying at home.

Sometimes, we need help from a professional to deal with the difficult thoughts and feelings that we experience. I want to encourage you to seek help when you need it. Self-care is a gift to yourself, and sometimes that gift is therapy. There are many behavioral health professionals in Lincoln County who can help you through this difficult time. Look in the health guide for providers or call your insurance provider to find out

who is in your network. Free behavioral health is available to all students and children in Lincoln County through the Region 9 School Based Health Center. Call 505-750-0141 for an appointment.

This time of social distancing, isolation, fear, and stress can cause some people to feel that life isn't worth living anymore. If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, call the National Suicide Previention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741741.