

Managing Uncertainty and Anxiety: Routine Engagement in Meaningful Activity Promotes Health & Hope

Nicole Raftis, OT Reg (Ont), Occupational Therapist

Engaging in meaningful activity provides purpose, productivity and fulfillment (1). During challenging and uncertain times, the importance of meaningful activity is magnified and can provide hope while promoting physical and mental health. People who engage in meaningful activities say they feel happier and healthier (2).

The CoVid 19 Pandemic has caused significant challenges and uncertainty for all Canadians. Decreased access to physical and mental health programs can create a sense of worry. Excessive exposure to frightening news, increased uncertainty and a lack of routine can increase stress and anxiety, especially for children. Many of the children and families that I work with are wondering about strategies to manage this difficult time. Many of the stroke survivors that I volunteer with will be self-isolating for a significant period of time due to increased risk.

A quick resource review, aimed to support physical and mental health, produced these ideas that may help us all get through this challenge together and potentially come out of this with some new skills:

1. Inform Yourself – with Facts and Hope

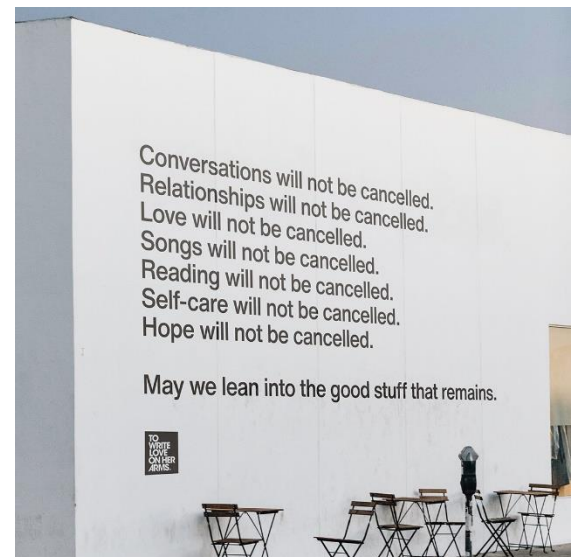
“You are what you eat”. Choose your information source carefully and create a “balanced diet” by seeking out positive, hopeful stories. Consider limiting tv news, especially for children – it can be overwhelming to hear/see scary forecasts and negative news stories all day long, leading to increased anxiety (3). Checking a well-informed news source once or twice/day, providing a child friendly explanation and focusing on how humanity is pulling together, can reduce anxiety and help children feel hopeful.

A few FACT based sources:

- The World Health Organization:
www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports
- CTV News: www.ctvnews.ca
- Scientific American:
<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/flattening-the-covid-19-curves>

A few HOPE based sources:

- www.goodnewsnetwork.org and their podcast “Good News Gurus”
- www.globalgoodness.ca
- www.instagram.com/globalpositivenews/?hl=en



“Everything mentionable is manageable...Look for the helpers”. Mr. Rogers

It is important for parents to help kids identify and validate feelings of fear or worry and provide reassurance that we are all coming together to manage this challenge. Focus on the health professionals that are treating the sick, researchers who are working on developing medications & a vaccine, governments that are getting the right equipment and providing financial support. Focus on the neighbours that are helping one another. Focus on what you can do to help your family members and community. **“Preparation & Planning, Not Panic”**, WHO (3)

2. Identify Meaningful Activities

It is highly likely that we will see school closures and the need for “social distancing” extend beyond April 5, 2020. For a clear understanding of social distancing, read or listen to this message from Toronto’s chief medical officer:

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/having-friends-over-for-coffee-is-not-social-distancing-toronto-s-top-doctor-1.4858783>

It is important to find meaningful activities that we can carry out in our homes or outdoors with safe distancing from friends and neighbours. If at all possible, families need to prepare to be at home. Playdates are not recommended at this time. Games that result in shared tools or close contact can share germs (ie. Basketball, soccer). The reality of the need to avoid non-essential contact may result in people feeling overwhelmed, isolated and bored. It can be helpful to identify meaningful activities that can help you get through this time of change.

There are so many opportunities for skill development through daily life activities. The next few months may provide some opportunities for children to increase their independence for life skills such as cooking, cleaning, organizing, connecting through written and typed mediums, as well as exploring on-line learning options. An easy formula to keep kids balanced: **Each day, try to do something for your body, brain, spirit and family team.** There are examples provided, some have links to further information; your family can create their own list of preferred activities within the categories below:

Physical (Body)	Cognitive (Brain)	Emotional (Spirit)	Productive (Team Work)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk • Bicycle • Let kids build obstacle courses for rolling/climbing • Ball hockey • Skipping Songs • Garden or yard work • Learn a physical skill ie. Buttons, Tying shoes, • Self Care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bubble Bath ○ Massage ○ Home made foot scrubs ○ Trim/paint nails ○ Home facials ○ Aromatherapy • Exercise at home: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Free online classes www.huffpost.com/entry/free-online-workout_b_7722024 ○ VON and YMCA may offer free videos too ○ Kids Yoga sites ○ Yoga with Adrienne ○ 7 min workout app ○ Wii Fit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading (individuals, together, audio books, You Tube stories, Choose Your Own Adventures) • Puzzles • Board & Card Games – see my Book & Game List • Word Searches • Virtual Tours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ www.insider.com/museums-theme-parks-offer-virtual-tours-ideal-for-social-distancing-2020-3 • Drawing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn to draw worksheets and on-line videos ○ Lunch Doodles with Mo Willems https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmzjCPQv3y8 • Educational Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to music • Create playlists • Try Meditation & Mindfulness Activities • Play/Cuddle with a pet • Religious institutions are offering video mass & encouraging group prayer • Keep a journal of inspirational quotes • Create a Vision Board (individually or as a family) • Stay Connected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Call or FaceTime family or friends ○ Send e-mails to family/friends (let the kids type) ○ Write letters or postcards ○ Create sidewalk chalk art or positive quotes in your neighborhood ○ Share a joke/riddle of the day at meal time ○ Create a “Neighbour Network” – a call list or use NextDoor app 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Meal Prep • Organize cupboards • Team clean your home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dishes ○ Laundry ○ Clean bathrooms ○ Sweep ○ Mop Floors ○ Empty Garbage bins ○ Dust ○ Wash windows ○ Wash walls ○ Clean out the garage ○ Sweep the porch/deck ○ Clean your car • Organize your room (s) • Re-arrange your room • Organize your computer files • Organize your photos or create a photo book • Go for a walk and pick up garbage in your neighbourhood • Cut the lawn and consider cutting the neighbours lawn (soon!)

3. Create a Routine & Celebrate Success

Everyone must find the balance that works for them/their family. Some people manage well with very flexible or little planning. Others prefer or require structure and routine to accomplish goals. Children tend to do well with clear expectations, organized routines and consistency. Especially during times of stress. This doesn't mean that unstructured "down time" can't be part of the plan.

Every family should consider their own needs and preferences for creating and communicating their routines. I have provided an example of a daily routine to consider. It is ideal to have children assist in creating the family routine. They can type it up on the computer, or write/draw the routine on paper. Post the routine in a central location (ie. Fridge) or have a copy of the routine in their bedroom.

Celebrate together when a family member completes a goal (ie. Learns to cook a new recipe, learns to tie their shoes, finishes a difficult book). There is a lot of learning that can happen during these daily activities.

Self-Care Create a wake-up routine that you find relaxing, Bathe as needed, Get Dressed
Nutrition Kids can help make a healthy breakfast, let them learn to cook
Brain Activity Choose a Cognitive Activity
Body Break Choose a Physical Activity
Nutrition Prepare lunch – try a new recipe if you have time
Productivity Choose a Productive Activity
REST Pretend you are Spanish and have a Siesta or Quiet Time. Play quiet calming music
Connect Choose an Emotional/Spiritual Activity
Nutrition Prepare Dinner – Kids can help with food prep, setting the table, clearing the table. Eat together and share a fun fact, joke/riddle or positive story over dinner.
Body Break If weather permits, get outside for a walk. Fresh air is good preparation for sleep
Relaxation Choose a relaxing Cognitive or Emotional/Social activity
Self-Care Create a calming bed time routine, wash face, brush teeth, read a positive story or journal about gratitude, Get into PJs, consider stretching or meditation

4. Seek Support When Needed

“Dealing with COVID is stressful. For most of us, the measures being taken with COVID have been unprecedented in how disruptive they are to our lives, our families and our friends. On the one hand, it is understandable that anyone would feel stressed out by the current situation. On the other hand, overreacting and coping in negative ways are not helpful. Humanity has faced other stressful times and survived. The good news is that there are many positive ways to cope and be resilient.”⁽³⁾

Many people have had to cancel/re-schedule their therapy sessions for the next while. There are numerous clinics offering Video or Telephone Consultation and Coaching, which can support parents and children to continue working on their physical and mental health goals at home. Reach out to your therapist if you would like to organize a Telehealth Coaching Session for you/your child.

There are also helpful parenting and mental health resources available on-line:

- www.ementalhealth.ca/Toronto/Mental-Wellness-and-Resiliency-while-Coping-with-COVID-19-Coronavirus/index.php?m=article&ID=62192
- www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html
- www.cpa.ca/corona-virus/
- www.autism.org/coronavirus-impact-home-all-day-basic-supports-and-strategies-to-get-us-through-and-keep-us-sane/

Why is your friendly neighbourhood OT sending you this message?

Occupational therapists work in contexts that promote good mental health and well-being, with the intention of both preventing the onset of mental health problems, and facilitating recovery for those experiencing mental health difficulties. Occupational therapists enable the participation and engagement of people in everyday living by using a holistic, bio-psychosocial, person-centred approach that encourages individuals to use their existing capabilities and strengths. Occupational therapists' expertise in relationship building and the therapeutic use of self are significant tools in determining meaningful activities that motivate and provide incentives for psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery. Occupational therapists enable people to be active and productive in their community by using evidence-based individual and population approach interventions including skills training, education, group work, self-management and strategies to encourage community and inclusion and participation. WFOT, 2019⁽⁵⁾

Wishing everyone a sense of community & hope at this time. Be well

Sincerely, Nicole

Nicole Raftis, OT Reg (Ont), Occupational Therapist. nicoleraftis@gmail.com

References

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