



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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5 ways you can cultivate joy in the age of a pandemic

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During times of stress and panic, we often hear recommendations for self-care, finding calm, and taking care of our mind and our spirit. While the effects of these activities can be extremely beneficial, I want to take a step back to adjust your perspective.

Rather than simply finding ways to avoid feeling anxious or depressed, I want to push you a little further to find moments of JOY throughout your day. Happiness is not found, but rather created. Here are some ideas for bringing JOY into your everyday life:

1. Help someone: One thing that has been missing greatly while in quarantine is the opportunity to connect with and help others. I have worked in non-profit my whole life and have found a lot of JOY in simply being with another human and helping them in the way that they need in that moment. While there feels to be less opportunities while at home, there are still people on the other side of the phone, computer, tablet, etc. that would love your help and support. Send a text/direct message/comment to a friend or acquaintance who may or may not be directly reaching out for support. Let them know that they are not alone and that you are here with them virtually. Being on the other side of a computer, people often get

a bad rap about their ability to be someone else as it often turns into negativity and hate. Take this opportunity to be someone you want to be, which may be difficult for you in person, and spread positivity and encouragement.

- 2. Create your own dance party:** Music makes me very happy and dancing to a loud, upbeat song truly brings me JOY. Find a place where you can turn the music up (maybe that means wearing headphones), pick a song that feels nostalgic or just plain fun, and get in a good 3-4 minutes of dancing! The effects of dancing range from reducing depression and stress to boosting energy and mood to improving cognitive flexibility (the ability to adapt to new and changing situation).
- 3. Satisfy your senses:** Our senses are directly connected to the pleasure centers of our brain. My most JOY-ful sense is taste. Generally, I try to eat fairly healthy and I cook at home most nights. But when I feel like I need a burst of JOY, I will decide to order dinner from one of my favorite restaurants or cook one of my favorite meals. The JOY I get from satisfying my sense of taste is long-lasting. You may find JOY in activating your sense of smell (go flower hunting in your neighborhood) or touch (cuddle with a partner or pet, or make some goo and squeeze it through your fingers). Whatever sense brings you the most JOY, get out there and satisfy it!
- 4. Go for a walk:** Now I know what you're thinking-all I do is walk; there's nothing else to do during quarantine! But I'm talking about a walk where you really look around you and experience your neighborhood. Walk on a different street than you usually do, stop

Continued on the next page.



Continued from the previous page.

and examine every tree or bush that you walk by, smell each flower that you come across, give a nod/smile/holler to the people you see. Truly experience your neighborhood from another perspective and appreciate what is around you. It's amazing what you see, smell, and hear when you activate all of your senses.

If it's not safe to walk in your neighborhood, I'd recommend driving to an area nearby where you feel like you can safely walk around, while still maintaining the 6-foot distance from others.

- 5. Find something to laugh about:** I know you've heard the phrase, 'laughter is the best medicine,' but it really is more than that. Laughter brings with it a vast amount of health benefits, such as staying off illnesses, strengthening the immune system, and releasing endorphins (the feel-good hormone). Laughter can bring you out of a funk and remind you of the lighter parts of your life.

I challenge you to truly laugh about something and NOT feel JOY-ous. Have a staring contest with your partner or child or friend (virtual staring contests work too!), play a quick game of Fibbage, Cards Against Humanity, or Telestrations (all can be played via computer/phone/etc), or look in the mirror and do something silly like talk with an accent or make goofy faces (yes, this sounds ridiculous but I bet you will laugh!). Laughter will bring that quick jolt of JOY to your day and the effects are lasting.

Then, make a JOY list. Throughout the day, make sure to record the things you do (or the things you don't do) that bring JOY into your life. This will serve as your reminder for ways to find JOY when you need a burst of happiness in your life but just can't figure out how to get there.

It's important to remember that when anxiety or depression feels like they're taking root within you, don't just avoid the pitfalls of these mental illnesses, make a concerted effort to actually bring JOY and happiness into your life! Even for a couple minutes each day. It can change your perspective and your direction.

