



BANYAN
THERAPY GROUP
REFUGE - RECOVERY - RESTORATION

Helpful Pandemic Tips from Helping Professionals Survey Results

Our world has been thrown into turmoil as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread. What some of us may have thought would be a brief period of quarantine and social isolation has turned into a chronic anxiety-ridden time, where many have struggled with both their medical and mental health.

As a result, we wanted to share some tips provided by helping professionals. These qualified individuals volunteered their time to answer the questions below. They shared their hearts and professional experience as a way to provide you peace, hope, and love during this challenging time.

Our hearts are with you. Together we will get through this.

Sincerely,
Dan Drake, LMFT, LPCC, CCPS-S, CSAT-S
Banyan Therapy Group Founder & Clinical Director
dan@banyantherapy.com

1) What are some "normal" responses to extended isolation that you've seen during this COVID-19 crisis?

Less conversation with others. Fewer moments of reaching out when needed.

Negative: Frustration in coupleship due to being "cooped up" with spouse 24/7. Feeling fearful of spouse acting out due to stress related to quarantine/loss of income. One client feeling triggered more with husband around more.

Positive: Due to quarantine, some spouses feel less stressed knowing they can "keep an eye on" their SA partner. Most of my clients are loving the extra time with their families.

I have seen partners relax a little as the lockdown restricts the addict's opportunities to act out. I give a 300-question symptom questionnaire with the work that I do. I do a 60 question follow up every 2 weeks.

All of my clients have spiked in their symptoms related to sleep, hyper/hypoactivity (nervous system is off balance). Anxiety is high also.

BANYAN

THERAPY GROUP

REFUGE - RECOVERY - RESTORATION

I noticed with an elderly client that his PTSD symptoms had gone up. And over an EEG, in his left temporal lobe, there was more slow activity (there was some slow already there) indicating that he possibly had some cognitive side effects.

I have observed people (including myself) cycling through fight/flight/freeze states. It is normal when we are facing an invisible threat that is ongoing, has no clear end in sight, and is evoking a lot of feelings of powerlessness and stress. Recognizing waves of intense and sometimes conflicting emotions as normal, can help us more quickly shift into action-oriented thinking.

Heightened fatigue is also normal. It is taking a lot more mental energy to do even the most basic of day-to-day tasks. Getting groceries, for example, is now a totally different process that involves new levels of risk, planning, and new behavior (e.g., wearing mask, steering clear of others, learning new online systems, etc.). The moral and mental fatigue is real and we need to give ourselves more grace and space to take on less or modify expectations of what gets done in a day. When the pandemic first hit, it initially felt kind of like a snow day and I was going gangbusters to get all sorts of lists knocked out at home... and then the wave of fatigue hit when I realized this was a longer-term reality. I am now focused on managing my energy more than my time.

Return of symptoms such as anxiety, negative thinking, in one case suicidality.

2) Those struggling with addiction may be having a difficult time maintaining sobriety during this time. What can they do to protect against relapse?

Stay connected. Attend online groups.

12-STEP!!!!!! Attend a small group, led by an experienced Coach or Therapist. Frequent check-ins with partner as well as sponsor/therapist/coach.

Put together a *Trigger Management Plan* - what can they you do to minimize your urges in response to boredom, stress, restlessness etc.

- Stick to a routine.
 - Be diligent about self-care and grounding work.
 - Stay connected.
 - Look for opportunities to leverage this time for good (e.g., find new ways to do things you enjoy, learn new things, improve your home physically and emotionally, work on spiritual development).
 - This time period is a masterclass in 'one day at a time', staying present, boundaries, and self-care. Lean in.
-

Attend online or phone 12-step meetings, meet more often with the CSAT, more frequent contact with sponsor or other supports via phone, prayer service online or TV for those so inclined.

Connection.

3) From what you have learned personally and professionally over these past couple of months, what tips would you give those seeking support regarding: MAINTAINING HEALTH DURING QUARANTINE?

Permission to feel new and unfamiliar feelings. Choose how you want to take the next transition step.

Find a healthy hobby that gives you purpose (something that doesn't involve family. We brainstorm ideas). Get plenty of sleep (min 8 hours), exercise needs to be a part of your daily routine, immune support vitamins.

Get out into nature, take long walks.

I have most of my clients buy an Ouraring to track their sleep. I have one also. Its been really useful in tracking when rest is not restful for myself and my clients and getting it back to being restful (exercise, prayer/meditation, eating, social contacts, finding joy and gratitude, watching how much screen time is being used, etc.).

It's great with clients to have physical data on their bodies to improve awareness of options.

- Keep a routine
 - Practice mindfulness and adopt a meditation practice
 - Limit news intake
 - Focus on a goal
 - Stay nourished and hydrated
 - Get outside
-

Stay connected with therapist, 12-step fellow-ship, attend online or phone meetings regularly, take a walk, spend time with family, snuggle with a pet, clean closets or take care of projects around the house, cook good food, watch movies, play music you like, learn a new recipe.

4) What tips would you give regarding: STAYING CONNECTED?

Schedule regular calls, zooms, visits with others when appropriate. Treat it like a "work project" of sorts - though there is no monetary pay, there is still great reward.

Zoom with extended family and friends. Stay connected with church members/leaders (if applicable) or join a Bible Study.

Definitely zoom calls - with family, friends & colleagues as often as possible. Organize family quiz nights via zoom.

I have tried to use this time to be more internally focused vs. externally focused. Sometimes talking to others is not helpful when all they want to discuss is how weird and stressful everything is right now. Staying connected to what I am feeling, where my stress level is at, and what I need helps me identify the types of people I can meaningful connect with that day, or if I need to step back.

Have dinner with family every night if possible, spend time with pets, stay in touch with people you care about, check in regularly with elderly family, friends.

Connection is crucial to sobriety and recovery.

5) What tips would you give regarding: MANAGING DEPRESSION OR SUICIDAL IDEATION?

Lots of affirmations. Inventory question "What I like about myself today is ...". Creating a resiliency journal.

Above my pay grade :-)) I refer them out to an APSATS therapist.

Reach out to your community. Have a circle of 5 that you can reach out to in times of need & make sure you remind yourself that they WANT to be there for you. Don't be afraid to reach out.

It is super easy to lose perspective when something is dragging out. Remembering that this is a short-term situation is really important.

As strange as it may sound, it was helpful for me to watch a documentary about the 1918 pandemic because the story had a beginning, middle and end. This one will, too, and it helped to be reminded of how others managed a pandemic and that things were learned and able to make society better as a result.

Reach out for help. Help is still available; it just may be available differently.

Limit how much news you watch on TV, watch just enough to stay informed, then watch a movie, limit snacking, eat good food, get outside at least once a day, spend time with pets, stay in touch with people you care about.

Reach out and know you are not alone.

6) What tips would you give regarding: ADDRESSING HELPLESSNESS OR POWERLESSNESS?

Recognizing what somatic sensation is present with those feelings and tend to those. Replace with gratitude in other areas of life.

Listen to Adam Roa's YouTube video every day - *You Are Who You Have Been Looking For*. Practice the mirror exercise every day.

- a) Identify 3 things that you are proud of yourself for
 - b) Look in the mirror & say out loud "<NAME> - I AM PROUD OF YOU FOR..."
 - c) Repeat for each thing.
-

It has helped me to use these feelings to recognize how much my pre-pandemic life was built around a false sense of security. What a valuable wake-up call! This time has allowed me to get much clearer on what is real and what is pseudo control. What do I really have control over? What was I basing security around previously that was really a mirage? This has helped me connect with the power I have internally to change my internal world in more real ways.

It's a shared human experience. Be gentle with yourself.

See this as a step one. Acknowledging what can and can't be controlled.

7) What tips would you give regarding: EASING CRIPPLING ANXIETY?

Staying in the present moment by grounding. Writing down the anxious thought and then ask "what else is in the realm of possibility that might work positively?"

Coping techniques like grounding, tapping, journaling, breathing, yoga.

List at least 3 daily practices that help you ease anxiety & religiously practice them...

- a) Meditation
- b) Prayer
- c) Motivational reading
- d) Visualization
- e) Walking in nature

- Epsom salt baths
- Bilateral music
- Calm app
- Medical help and intervention
- Getting real with myself and using facts and accurate information to bring myself back to earth

Limit how much news you watch on TV, watch just enough to stay informed, then watch a movie, limit snacking, eat good food, get outside at least once a day, spend time with pets, stay in touch with people you care about.

One breath at a time.

8) What tips would you give regarding: HANDLING FINANCIAL INSECURITY?

Budget needs versus wants. Determine what the need might be under the insecurities.

- List your financial commitments
- List your dependable income
- List potential opportunities for additional income
- List cost-cutting initiatives (e.g. I used to have my nails done every 3 weeks - not had them done for 11 weeks of lockdown! RESULT!)

- Safety nets are available
- Identify if pride or shame are hindering asking for help

- Have a plan
- Develop strategies
- Careful with spending
- Be realistic

Ask and receive help.

Avoid futurizing - stay present - stay connected.

9) What tips would you give regarding: OTHER THEMES YOU'VE SEEN IN YOUR PRACTICE?

Encouraging clients to do values work - has been empowering during this time. Creating a lot of space for options when many feel trapped, stuck. Extroverts getting a chance to socialize in creative ways. Introverts making efforts to reach out.

Keep seeing your counselor - zoom works well for social distancing,

Listen and observe what your reactions to this extraordinary situation are mirroring back to you about your life, relationships, home, career, security, vulnerabilities, etc.

Get religious about self-care.

- Conflict within household with spouse
- Learning to co-exist under one roof when in a crisis
- Not binging on TV or internet
- Ruminating over past
- Fear about future

We are in this together.

I have seen those who already tend to isolate are having the toughest time. Again, I encourage connection and anxiety reducing practices.

10) What words of support would you like to give to someone suffering during this time?

Realize your choices and pick one and try it. Not having to make big decisions right now. But re-enter at your pace.

Only do what you feel safe doing. If you have to go back into a public place, and you don't feel safe, do what you can to protect yourself and feel safe (gloves, mask, social distancing, sanitation practices).

Boundaries... Boundaries... Boundaries.

Be clear about where you stand with re-entry. Know your own truth in the matter.

Trust your gut and allow yourself to honor a pace that feels right.

- Emerge gradually and in your own time
- Take necessary precautions, express gratitude
- Get your hair cut, nails done
- Other self-care activities

11) What words of support would you like to give to someone suffering during this time?

Much of what we experienced was forced choice going into quarantine and now there can be more empowered choice. Take it one step at a time. Don't throw yourself right back into where you were if you're not ready. Transition is hard but often so worth it on the other side.

This is temporary. You are still you and the world will still turn. Try to focus on the "NOW" and not the "what if's" of the future. If fear is involved, I do a fear exercise involving asking "why are you afraid" at least 4-5 times to get to the root of their fear and then process that. I also ask "what's the worst-case scenario" in the same manner. "What's the worst-case scenario if you lose your job? Okay...what's the worst-case scenario of that?", etc. Usually it's not as bad as you think, and if it is you can process with the fear questions stated above. If you are Christian, I turn to scripture to help my clients feel calm and safe.

This too will pass, it may pass like a gallstone, but it will pass. You are stronger than you believe; keep believing in that!

It's a very challenging time and you are not alone in your struggles. In my work, all of my clients have spiked in their symptoms. Even those with normally stable lives.

It is virus. It is not war. It is not hate. We can do this.

- You have the tools to do this
- It is okay to ask for help, reach out to others
- We will move through this together
- You are not alone

12) If you would like to share your information, what is your area of specialty and how can clients reach you?

Coaching betrayed partners and those in abusive relationships, including intimacy anorexia and love avoidance.

Shawna Meek, CPC, ACC, APSATS-CPC
Personal Relationship Coach
Betrayal Trauma Specialist
shawna@livingstonescoaching.com
www.LivingStonesCoaching.com

Betrayal/SA partner Coach
www.hopecfl.com
tiffany@hopecfl.com

Angela Fletcher
You can contact me at atfletch7@gmail.com if you'd like to connect.

I do QEEG and Neurofeedback in Houston. I am holistic in the work that I do and consider mind and body (referrals to doctors and sleep studies are common). My work is QEEG guided and for many clients, teaching awareness and self regulation becomes a cornerstone to the work that I do. My clients have different goals...stability during trauma, peak performance, addressing issues of Anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD related issues, addiction, emotional regulation, strengthening their truth and ability to stay grounded and centered.