

## Structure and Routines in the face of COVID-19



### Topics Covered

- Why a Newsletter?
- COVID-19 and its impact on daily functioning
- Importance of Structure and Routines
- Strategies for individuals, parents, and families

# Mindful Mondays

03/23/2019

COVID-19, it's everywhere. It's in the news, it's on our timelines, in our emails, in our conversations, and on our hands if we don't wash them. This tiny microscopic virus has swooped into our daily lives and hit the brakes harder than a lot of us could have ever imagined. And with that hard stop, has come a lot of unexpected changes for each of us as individuals and as families. We're in a time where many of us are socially distancing ourselves placing us in closer contact with our immediate families.

Some of us may like this extra time spent together, other may have difficulties with it, and some of us may still be adjusting to it all. The tweet to the left spoke to me when thinking about my own adjustment to foreseeably living and working within the confines of the same four walls of my home due to social distancing efforts. Especially after realizing there were no more cheese sticks in the refrigerator.

"Where has all the food gone?" I asked myself.

It took a little while, but upon further investigation I realized that I had eaten about 6 cheese sticks in a matter of one hour. And by investigation, I mean my fiancé found 6 cheese stick wrappers on our bedside table and was understandably unhappy with me (she also wanted cheese sticks).

Why did I eat so many?

It's because life has been stressful! Things have thrown all of us for a loop and food is comforting. Food occupies our senses and provides delicious relief from the grips of our anxieties.

My plan is to write a newsletter/blog like this twice a week to be delivered every Monday and Wednesday to talk about the many different aspects of COVID-19's impact on parenting, mental health, well-being, etc. Depending on how long this goes topics will likely become more generalized, but I think everyone would agree that the sooner we can return to normalcy the better. My hope is these posts can be informational and useful to our staff, to our friends and families, and most importantly to the families that we work with where stressors related to pandemics and other unforeseen global stressors are often secondary.

## Contact Me

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## Structure and Routine

Today I want to discuss the importance of maintaining structure and routine within your day, especially when the world has all but entirely stopped. As a result, our typical routines may feel completely out of sorts. Days may feel extremely long, or extremely short. You may begin to feel restless; you may begin to feel stuck, and in my case, you may begin unknowingly eating all your snacks. Kids will have similar feelings and behaviors, and often have a hard time communicating or even acknowledging them which can lead to increased anxiety, mood fluctuations, and conflict with family members.

This is where structure and routine become useful in reducing the anxieties, restlessness, and that feeling of being stuck by giving us comfort and predictability amid uncertainty. Below are a few strategies to explore using in your own home whether for yourself, you and your partner, or your family.

If you've implemented these and have found success, share it with loved ones or people you know, be a catalyst for positive change amidst a lot of the negative we've been listening to and seeing in the news.

### Fight for and Maintain Those Routines

Before the pandemic, many of us had routines in place for ourselves and our families. Things changed quickly with school closures, working from home, gym closures, decreased hours, etc. These changes can destroy a routine and can often leave us feeling like we have no control over our circumstances.

Take back some of that control by rebuilding routines for yourself and your family.

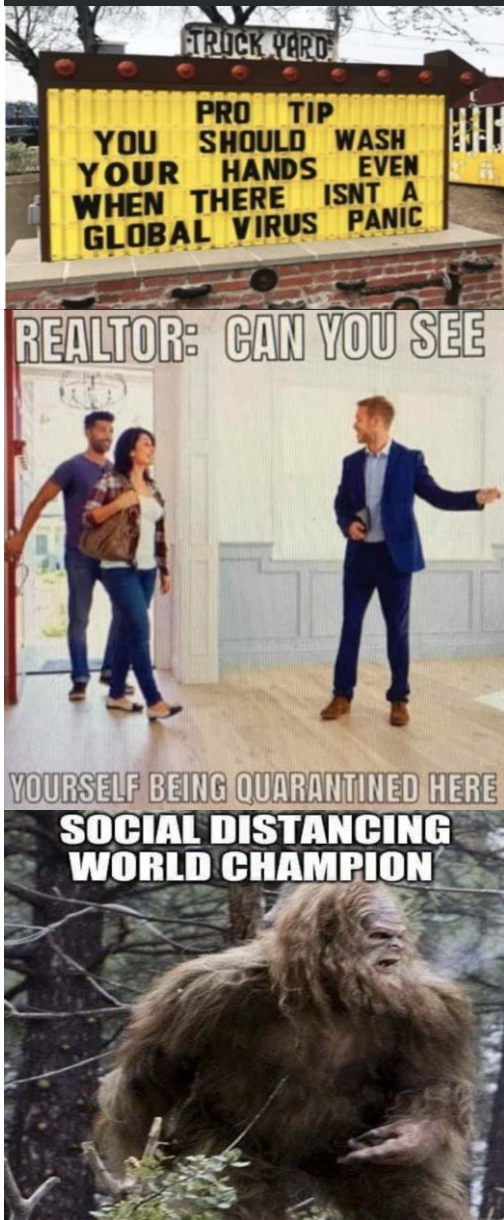
Stick with what worked best prior to the pandemic, mirror your routines from what they looked like at the beginning of the year.

For kids and the switch to e-learning, establish "school hours" in consultation with your kids and/or their teacher; they will know their school days best. These hours can help organize their day and provide structure around when their learning is to occur during the day, especially when adhering to lesson plans that may come with no time limit or time structure.

Within these schedules leave time for breaks, not only for your kids but for yourself! We all need a distraction throughout our day. Distractions help us re-charge and prepare us to re-engage in our work or our learning. If you have kids at home, take your break with them!

- Side note: Consider your child's development when using structured breaks. Younger children will need free time to play, be creative, and use their imagination. Older children and teenagers may need time to disconnect from their learning by playing video games, talking to friends, or getting energy out through physical activity

## Memes for Needed Distraction:



Those of you with kids at home, think about how their school-day typically starts. Usually, it starts with a homeroom, morning announcements, etc. This often goes overlooked, but morning announcements are very helpful when it comes to grounding and preparing a child for the day ahead of them. Take time out of your mornings for a family meeting to review expectations for the day, goals, chores, To-Do's, etc. Let your kids know what their day may look like!

Set reasonable and flexible bedtime schedules/routines for yourself and your family; the better you can adhere to a consistent sleep-wake schedule the more the mind and body will feel in rhythm and the less out of sorts we will feel. Get up and go to bed around the same time every day and night, don't let working from home change your typical routine.

- Side note: If your kid(s) stuck to the schedule and did a great job throughout the day, let them know, reward them with some extra time at the end of the day. Another 30 minutes won't hurt them; it will help them feel accomplished and will reinforce their positive behavior going into the next day.

## Add Something New

With change comes opportunity, and in this case, opportunity to add something new to you or your family's day. Doing so may help you and your family acknowledge the uncertainty all of us are facing in ways that feel safe, novel, and exciting.

Sometimes acknowledgement of life being chaotic can be enough to help us reset and recalibrate. Emphasize this with yourself and your family by bringing something new into your daily lives (i.e. reading a book, doing a puzzle, family game night, yoga, etc.). I've decided to add 30-45 minutes a day of understanding our universe from an astrophysics perspective. What may you and/or your family add?

Add the new activity to your already established schedule or take something out of your schedule and replace it with this new activity.

Ask yourself, "What did I do when I was younger when technology wasn't as readily available?" Nowadays technology may be overly available, but the point is to get creative and go back to what's tried and true. Maybe it was playing charades, maybe it was shadow puppets, maybe cards or Uno, the options are endless.

Check out this link for more inspiration for what you can add to your routine with your family:

<https://parade.com/1009774/stephanieosmanski/things-to-do-with-kids-during-coronavirus-quarantine/>

## Final Thoughts

We've got some odd and tough times ahead of us. I think an important part amidst everything associated with this chaos is that we are all doing the best we can. Remember that as we move forward into the end of March and into April. Be proud of this, **you** are doing your best, **your partner** is doing their best, and **your kids** are doing their best. Somedays may end up perfect, others will not, and that is okay. There will be hiccups along the way, but when we can focus our energy on setting those days up for success by maintaining our routines and/or adding something new the less hiccups we may end up experiencing along the way.

Stay healthy, socially distance yourselves, and lets all keep working towards brighter times!

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