A psychologist weighs in on beating boredom while social distancing

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Professor David Sbarra is a clinical psychologist and director of the Laboratory for Social Connectedness and Health in the Department of Psychology. He studies how human health—both psychological and physical—is tied to our close relationships.

Below are some of his tips for coping with boredom, anxiety and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as some ideas for making the most of this time of social distancing.

Preventing boredom

- Keep a routine. When will you work? What does the basic schedule of the day look like? Think about how you can maintain basic routines, such as sleep/wake, meal prep, exercise and physical activity, socializing in any form and relaxation.
- Look for opportunities to structure your time? redesign your room, watch some films, do body weight exercise regimens. Write letters to people. Write poetry. Keep a diary of what's happening for your loved ones.
- Think about using this time to engage in some new activities. Music? Making art? Would you like to read some books? Go for it. Maybe you've wanted to try meditating? Now would be a good time. Keeping your mind active will be key to managing boredom.

Focusing on activities that lift your mood

- Go to a park or hike in the mountains. Garden. Do yoga or stretch. Not only does physical activity help us regulate negative moods, the benefits extend to the night as well; the more our physical output, the more our bodies will be prepared to sleep.
- Find a means to connect with others without over-connecting on social media, or constantly "being in the know" about the news. Families will likely be doing social distancing together, so find time to really connect with your loved ones. Focus on them by asking questions and exploring how they're feeling and coping. Giving support has many positive benefits to the givers as well as the receivers. Also, consider actually calling your loved ones; have a deeper conversation than a text exchange allows. FaceTime friends and family and "do something" while you're on the connection? like watch a show together.
- Don't give in to the urge to binge-watch shows or follow the news all day. This is fine in the short term, but it is not a long-term solution.

Dealing with anxiety

- Try to connect to the present moment and recognize that, unless there is an immediate medical emergency, we can just take a couple of slow, deep breaths to let worried thoughts pass through our mind as we re-engage in the task at hand? working, being
with kids, checking on friends or the like.

- If a partner or other loved one is over-engaging with anxious thoughts, try to interact in a way that takes a more accepting stance. If your partner says, "I'm just so strung out by all this? it's making me crazy," you might say, "Yes, it's so stressful. Let's just take it one day at a time and keep things simple. We can only do what we can do." The bottom line is this: Don't co-ruminate.

- Control what you can control: Wash your hands, do social distancing, self-quarantine if you're exposed, isolate if you're sick after seeking medical attention, consider limiting social media, keep a routine as well as possible, and practice good self-care. Eat as well as possible, limit the booze, get as much physical activity as you can, be outside if possible, reach out to others through any means, and create an environment? quiet and dark? that is conducive for sleep so you can get enough rest.

**Avoiding information overload**

- Limit yourself to checking trusted and reliable sources a few times a day.
- Consider scheduling planned breaks during the day and, during those times, avoid the constant barrage of messages.
- Avoid engaging with social media right before bedtime. We need to create a "glide path" toward sleep and activating your mind at the wrong time has a negative effect.
- Decide how much time you'll spend on social media and stick to the plan.

*These tips were adapted from a Q&A [2] that was originally posted on UANews [3].*

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[1] https://arizona.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=da52b7e35b34be2eabc30a24&id=81799e1000&ep=-09bc5182bd