

Mental Health Strategy for the Covid-19

*Ideas based on resources from Christina Malecki and Rachel Miller
that circulated between First United Community members*

Our regular ways of being community and our supports will be different or not readily available. We all need to pay attention and to have a plan to see us through this unique time.

Here are some key considerations in order to develop a mental health strategy.

1. In general, what makes you feel better when you're down? Make a list of the things that are helpful.
2. In general, what makes you feel worse when you are struggling? Make a list of those things to avoid.
3. How are you tending to your body, mind, emotions, and spiritual life with sense of purpose and emotions? Again, make a list of what helps you.
 - a. Body - Yoga, meditation, stretching, movement, hot baths, naps, walks, etc. The best way to calm your body is through your 5 senses. List what's most nurturing for all 5 senses.
 - b. Mind - Books, puzzles, games, magazines, learning something new, etc. Identify and have the resources "at hand".
 - c. Emotions - journaling, meditation, self-compassion practice, reaching out to loved ones, therapy, etc. Write down the resources/people to whom you can reach out.
 - d. Spiritual life – small groups studies, contemplative practice, prayer, meditation, daily gratitude, activism etc. Write down what nourishes you.
4. How are you tending to your supportive relationships?
 - a. Who is in your support system? List them, and make contact so that they are there if you need them through the coming days.
 - b. Consider setting up regular phone calls or video chats with support systems.
 - c. Consider writing letters or cards or postcards.
 - d. Have you safely formed a Covid bubble of people you can see in person?
5. Remember to pay attention to the following:
 - a. What is your social media threshold?
 - b. What is your news consumption threshold?

Prepare a Crisis Plan (contact Brian if you need further resources/people)

1. List the signs that you are heading into a mental health crisis.
2. Establish a plan (preferable write it down) if a mental health crisis happens.
3. Find one person to be your mental health buddy to check in with on a daily or weekly basis.
4. Review Ottawa Public Health's mental health resources on website, including the Mental Health Crisis line at 613-722-6914 (7 days a week/24 hours a day) and the following link https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/mental-health-and-addiction_services.aspx
5. Share your plan with one other person.

Some Helpful Questions to ponder:

Is there something you can do that will solve one recurring challenge in your life? Look for one seemingly small but wildly irritating source of frustration in your life, the thing in your home or your room that annoys you and solve it—e.g, a too-small trash can, the absence of blinds or curtains, or socks that are always slipping down.

Is there anything that would help you deal with cold and wet weather, practically speaking? As the Norwegian phrase goes, “There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.” While there is absolutely such a thing as bad weather (wind!! horrible!!!), this phrase still makes its point. So: do you need an actual winter jacket, actually good gloves, waterproof boots, or those pocket hand warmers? If you are lucky enough to have a patio or backyard, would an outdoor space heater or patio string lights make a demonstrable difference in your life? Take note and start researching your options.

If you're working or studying from home, are there any changes you could make that would help you focus or feel good? That might look like stacking up books to create a standing desk; buying a used monitor on the cheap; getting a lap desk that would change your working-from-bed life; moving your desk near a window; or downloading a white noise app and shutting your door to better drown out your housemate's calls. Or it could just mean finally figuring out how to take regular coffee and lunch breaks.

What can you do to ensure that you stay social? A lot of people are, reasonably, worried about feeling extra lonely and isolated this winter. While you may not be able to easily make new friends IRL, there might be some other options that would at least help. Set up Coffee/Wine dates, mutual watching of movies that you can discuss later, shared meals using Zoom, etc.

Is there anything that would help you feel more comfortable and more like yourself? Maybe you'd thrive in a monochromatic sweat suit that makes you feel like at least you tried, or maybe you need to make sure you dress for the day, or find some cozy socks that'll actually keep your feet warm.

When monotony sets in and you feel bored, what can you turn to for entertainment? Hobbies are great, but if you know in your heart that you're never going to get into knitting or other such things, try thinking about what slightly-structured or repeatable activities might be fun to do when you're stuck at home. Some ideas to get you started: work your way through a TV series, read one book each month, learn to play a tabletop or card game, do a daily crossword puzzle, attend virtual film festivals, keep one plant alive.

How can you literally brighten up dark days? Light is important, consider getting string lights, or candles or a new lamp, and place them about your living space.

How are you preparing for periods of loneliness? Lean into loneliness — and know you're not alone in it. Here is a resource where filmmaker Andrea Dorfman reunites with poet Tanya Davis to craft a tender and profound animation on the theme of isolation, providing a wise and soaringly lyrical sequel to their viral hit *How to Be Alone*. <https://www.nfb.ca/film/how-to-be-at-home/>