

Welcome to COVID-19: Preparing Yourself and Your Family. This module will discuss social distancing and how to keep your sanity when you are quarantined. My name is Sam Lushtak and I am the owner of Absolute EHS.

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Let's start by defining social distancing. According to the CDC this means staying out of crowded areas, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distances of 6 feet from others. What does this mean in laymen's terms? It means we need to avoid people and if we do happen to see people – we need to stay at least 6 feet away from them. AT LEAST 6 feet. This is because the Coronavirus can be transmitted through an infected person's spit, mucus, or snot and we want to make sure we are far enough away to avoid any accidental sneezes – remember, it's still cold and flu season and allergy season is right around the corner. If you have further questions about this concept, I would like to direct you to my other video called "Degrees of Separation: Flattening the Curve".

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To review, let's take another look at this 'flattening the curve' diagram, discussed further in another video. In a nutshell, if we do not socially isolate and minimize our potential to contaminate common surfaces, we are at risk of being this pink curve which means that our healthcare system, the dashed line, is grossly flooded and many people will not get the help they need. If we practice social distancing and reduce or, better yet, eliminate our outings that would lead to common surface contamination, we can become the grey curve. The one that is just below the maximum capacity of our healthcare system. We need to get there, ideally lower, to ensure as many people get their medical needs met as possible.

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The digital age, or information age, is the time during which computers were modernized and knowledge sharing and social interactions increased exponentially. This started with the development of computers, to the internet, and then the widespread use of email. Once the technology became available, cellular phones were developed and quickly evolved from the size of a briefcase to something that fit easily in one hand. The long and short of it is, we now have the internet – and it's far faster than it used to be - we can stream zoo tours and museum tours from all over the world – we can learn languages and we can call and video chat with friends and family. In a strange way we are more connected than we were before because we don't actually HAVE to be anywhere to see and talk to someone.

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Before we look at the next slide I want to discuss a phenomenon that many psychologists call 'psych 101 syndrome'. In medicine you might hear this called 'medical student's disease'. These terms are offshoots of what many of us know as hypochondria and it's a natural symptom of anxiety and new knowledge. This is completely normal. Remember last time someone mentioned lice and you instinctively scratched your head? When is the last time your friend or significant other said they had a sore throat and you suddenly 'realized' you had one too and wondered where it came from? Especially when we are in a state of high anxiety and we are learning about a new thing, a disease in this case, we become highly susceptible to suggestion – particularly when we know the symptoms to look out for.

That said, we should all practice social distancing regardless of how we feel. However, if we do have symptoms we should self-monitor, stay home, and notify our primary care doctors by phone. DO NOT go to any offices or hospitals unless you are explicitly told to do so by a doctor and they know to expect you.

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So what can we do to keep ourselves mentally stimulated? I've seen a lot of chat on social media revolving around binge watching shows or not needing to get out of sweatpants for 4-8 weeks. I hate to break it to you but this is a terrible idea. Some of the key indicators of depression, and some actions we might allow ourselves to take, can lead to depressive episodes – even if we are not prone to this. Wearing the same clothes every day, not bathing, not eating well, and allowing a mess to form around us will lead to heightened anxiety and depressive moods.

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To keep our wits about us we need to try to have as normal a day as possible, every day. Make a schedule that is time-specific and stick to it. Wake up at your normal time (or at least within 2 hours of sunrise). Shower, get dressed, have breakfast at the table by a specific time. It is hard but refrain from eating in front of the tv or on the couch. When you are done, put everything away, do your dishes, and then move to the next activity. Try your best to limit screen time. For those of us with kids, this may seem like an incredibly daunting task but if we try to at least consider the screen time averaged over the week – this may be more helpful. Be aware of what you are watching. COVID-19 news coverage all day will not be helpful – break it up with some comic relief, a science fiction show you've always wanted to watch, or that movie you kept putting off until you had more time. Watching a movie with your family tends to be a treat and we would like to keep it as such and not turn it into the new normal.

Get fresh air. Remember your social distancing but try to get outside. Even if this means opening a window and sitting by it – this will allow for some sun exposure, fresh air, and the ability to change our focus. Do this at least once a day. If you do have access to open spaces or a backyard, utilize them. Just remember not to interact with anyone outside of your household within 6 feet and do not share objects (meaning – do cloud watching with a neighbor instead of playing soccer).

Contact friends and/or family daily if possible and make this part of your set schedule with an assigned time. You can use email, phone, or video conferencing. We need to keep up with social contact. We are all in this together. If you are more introverted and nervous about being 'stuck in a conversation' you can tell the friend or family member that you have allotted this much time to the phone call before you decide to do personal mental hygiene, such as read a book. We need to respect each other with this as well.

Do something you find interesting every day. Reading a book or article, planning your dream bathroom, whatever the case may be.

Finally, practice good sleep hygiene and go to bed at the same time every evening. Decide what time you are waking up as part of your set schedule, let's say 7am, and decide on your bedtime by subtracting 8-9 hours. This means your bedtime is 11pm every day. No screens at least 1 hour before bed – this means no checking your email from bed and no watching tv to fall asleep. It's hard to do if you're not used to it but you will sleep better and it gets easier with practice. Leave your phone plugged

in to charge outside of your bedroom. If you must use your phone as an alarm, put it in 'do not disturb' mode. We also want to make sure we go to sleep at the same time every night and aim for 8-9 hours of sleep daily. The first few nights may be difficult but I promise it gets easier.

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Kids need to keep to schedules with set times, practice good hygiene, and get dressed every day too. The difference is that children often need to be reminded, coached, or more firmly parented, especially as tensions mount due to 'cabin fever'. You are not alone. There will be fights and tears in every household, that's just a fact. Reach out to a local parenting group on social media or call 2-1-1 to find ways to connect with other families and share tips, tricks, and activities to keep kids occupied. For those of us with children who still nap, make sure nap time, just like our bedtime, is at the same time every day. We also need to make sure we are feeding our children balanced diets. Canned vegetables, fruits, and/or meats will still be more nutritionally dense than that cookie they are begging you for or the frozen pizza. Just like with screen time, evaluate a child's diet as an average over an entire week. We will all have a few days of mostly cookies for meals, as long as it's balanced out over the week, I would call that a win.

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For all of us, being cooped up will lead to a lot of sitting, likely on couches, chairs, or beds and possibly in awkward positions. That is okay but we want to remember that normally during our day we are at work, at a dining table, walking around, or doing an activity. We do not want to give in to sitting exclusively in the comfy chair. It likely provides little to no support and can quickly lead to neck, shoulder, and back pains. Try to spend as much time as possible in a stiffer chair, like what you likely have by your kitchen table. Sit on the floor. Move around in your home. A good rule of thumb is to get up every 30 minutes and go to the bathroom, get a glass of water, pick up a piece of garbage – whatever you need to do.

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There are many resources available during this time. Social media is a big one as I have seen many groups creating shared documents with support, community resources, and ideas on what to do while you're home. Remember that friends and family are a phone call away – call them! You can also look for therapists online. Many are now offering phone sessions and accept most health insurances or work on a sliding scale. This means if you are struggling financially they may be able to adjust their prices in order to better assist you. Remember, many therapists are sole proprietors so they may also have a struggling businesses – they will be eager to work with you.

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Thank you so much for listening to this module on keeping your sanity while quarantined. Feel free to email me if you have any questions, personal or about this presentation, at [Samantha.Lushtak@absoluteehs.com](mailto:Samantha.Lushtak@absoluteehs.com). Feel free to also check out my website for a full length, 45 minute, webinar that was previously recorded with a lot more information in it or check out one of my other short modules on the topic.

Finally, please consider supporting my small business at this time, particularly if you found this information or the worksheets and documents on the website helpful. Donations can be made via PayPal or through Venmo to Samantha-Lushtak.

Stay safe out there and wash your hands!