

COVID-19: How you can get through Home Isolation and Quarantine

Psychological Help in Challenging Times

Home isolation and quarantine are exceptional circumstances, which most people have never experienced. The measures taken can affect the psyche and can be very stressful for those affected. There are clear, scientifically researched and proven behavioral measures, as well as mental strategies, that can make this difficult time easier to master.

The Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists (Berufsverband Österreichischer PsychologInnen, BÖP) has created this fact sheet, based on this scientific knowledge, to help you in your self-care to get through this challenging time. As a general rule, every person is different and should therefore consider the recommendations that suit them best.

General practical tips



Maintain a daily routine!

Structure helps against chaos, provides security, and gives strength in stressful situations. Our daily routine is comparable to a ritual: don't stay in your pajamas all day. Instead, get up, get dressed, and stick to your normal eating, sleeping, work, and/or learning times. Adjust your daily routine to the current situation.



Reflect on your strengths!

Inner resources can help one to get through crisis situations. Inner resources are all of your positive life experiences, all the problems you have already solved and overcome, your strengths and talents, all of your available skills, aptitudes, etc. Inner resources are a source of strength. Activate and use them!



Plan your day as precisely as possible!

Planning your daily actions prevents loss of control and helplessness. Precise planning helps one to feel that they are actively shaping their day, as opposed to being at the mercy of the situation and feeling helpless.



Move your body!

Movement works wonders for the mind, and has a scientifically proven, positive effect on our psyche. Sport is also possible in small spaces. There are lots of training programs and suggestions on the internet. Every sore muscle is a victory!



Consume media deliberately and purposefully!

Facts help against emotional overload. Serious and clear information provides orientation and security. Be careful and avoid unlimited media consumption.



Maintain your contacts through video chat!

Closeness to family and friends provides stability. Call or video chat with your family and friends. "What made you happy today?"

Helpline 01/504 8000, helpline@boep.or.at

The Helpline of the Berufsverbandes Österreichischer PsychologInnen provides quick and competent help.

www.psychnet.at

Psychnet is the online information system for psychological services of BÖP



1. Measures against anxiety and major worries

New stressors and unusual emotions can arise in unfamiliar times. It can take time to adjust to these new circumstances and its challenges.

■ **Limit your media consumption!**

Consciously construct and limit your media consumption regarding COVID-19. Constantly being confronted with images and descriptions is not helpful but rather stressful, even if it is from reputable media sources.

■ **Avoid fearmongers!**

Set boundaries and avoid reading the massive amounts of SMS, emails, videos, WhatsApp messages, and other messages that are circulating on social media.

■ **Focus on the positives!**

Focusing on positive content can provide calm and stability. Talk to those close to you and be mindful of positive topics of conversation.

■ **Take your feelings seriously!**

We all have different feelings during this unfamiliar time, for example, confusion, fear, or stress. These feelings are perfectly understandable, but you could start to feel overwhelmed with so many of the them. Take time to identify and express these feelings. Some people like to write down these feelings or use creative outlets, such as painting, making music, or meditating.

■ **Talk about your feelings!**

If you feel the need to talk to someone about your feelings, then turn to a helpful, close friend or family member. If there

is no one close to you that you'd like to discuss your feelings with, seek professional guidance. The Helpline from BÖP or a clinical psychologist offering e-counseling (e.g. Skype or telephone sessions) are resources that could be used.

■ **Limit your ruminating thoughts!**

Replaying thoughts over and over in one's mind is one of the many strategies in dealing with stressful situations. Too much can be counterproductive and create more stress. Think about activities you can do if your ruminating thoughts become too frequent. Brainstorm possible activities beforehand, such as baking, reading, or writing. Do something that is completely different, that feels good for you.

■ **Do simple relaxation exercises!**

Anxiety and relaxation can't happen at the same time. Therefore, do some relaxation exercises that can reduce your anxiety. Many different relaxation exercises can be found on the internet.

■ **Remember, the situation is temporary!**

It is important to remember that the COVID-19 outbreak will eventually pass. Remember to practice ways to reduce your risk of getting sick, such as regular handwashing and avoiding close contact with others. Plan activities that you would like to do when the outbreak has passed.

2. Measures in dealing with children and adolescents



Isolation is a strain. The primary goal in isolation is to manage it as stress-free as possible. The isolation is not there to fix family problems. Child rearing and conflict management with a partner should not be the focus during this time.

■ Keep to a daily routine.

■ Clearly plan learning and free time.

■ Clearly define times when everyone has alone time.

■ Do activities together.

■ Allow options to withdraw to prevent or reduce conflicts.

■ Allow your child to get physical exercise within the limits of the current circumstances.

■ Develop rules together of how to utilize this extra time in the best possible way.

■ Together with your child, limit "screen times" for TV, phone,

and computer.

■ Explain the current situation to your child in age-appropriate terms.

■ Accept if your child is more affectionate than usual and meet your child's needs. They need security and comfort right now.

■ Refrain from carrying out big changes in your parenting style right now and avoid using punishments. Try to use praise to positively reinforce your child's behavior.

3. Measures against conflicts

Feelings of discomfort or exhaustion can arise when being confined to your living quarters. It is common for conflicts to arise among partners or families due to the amount of time being spent together. All of this can result in arguments, including acts of violence.

- Clearly define specific times to be spent alone.
- Allow family members the option to withdraw or retreat.
- Address anger, before a situation escalates
- Take a short walk alone, in your neighborhood or in the woods.
- Make time for a daily family meeting to talk about how everyone is doing, who needs what, or what ideas or wishes individual family members have.
- Be more forgiving than usual, with yourself and with those around you! This is indeed challenging for all families.
- Get professional help if necessary, through relevant hotlines or crisis intervention hotlines, such as the BÖP Helpline at 01/504 8000. More information can be found at www.boep.or.at.

4. Measures against boredom



You may suddenly have an unusual amount of free time, as you may not be working, or your other free time activities have been suspended. It is important that you still keep a daily routine and set goals that you can achieve.

- Plan out your tasks for the day.
- Start projects that you have been putting off. Even small jobs can be taken care of now.
- Plan one highlight that you can look forward to each day.
- Stay in contact with people that are important to you. Exchange positive things going on and plan activities that you can do together after the quarantine.

5. Measures against violence



Confined spaces, lack of options to retreat, and a shortage of intimacy can lead to aggression and violence. Actively and consciously counteract an escalation of the situation. Here are some options.

- **Recognize and name violence, even with yourself!**
Violence has many forms: hitting, shouting, devaluing, ignoring for long periods... Be honest with yourself and react when you realize that you are starting to become overwhelmed and violent as a result.
- **Call others to calm yourself.**
Call a friend, even if it's just to talk to someone else again. If possible, go to another room. Take a deep breath. If that doesn't help, call the crisis hotline, like BÖP's Helpline at 01/504 8000. More information can be found at www.boep.or.at.
- **Don't live out violence!**
Negative emotions, tension, and aggression are normal in extenuating circumstances. It's not bad to have aggressive feelings towards others. It's dangerous when those feelings are acted on.
- **When violence happens, talk!**
If you notice that other adults at home are becoming violent, especially towards children and adolescents, talk to them. Maybe you are the only one who can ensure protection for the child in this situation. Allow yourself to be supported, too: from calling a domestic violence center helpline, counseling for men, contact a child protection center, contact Rat auf Draht, or by seeking out psychological services.
- **Get help if you are affected by violence!**
Naturally, this applies if you are the victim of violence yourself: get help. It is important to not be alone. You are not alone, even if it seems like it because of the quarantine. Seek out help from friends or guidance services, such as domestic violence and child protection centers. In cases of heavy violence, contact the police and/or child welfare services.
- **Above all: Get help quickly!**
Don't wait until it's too late. The above tips against boredom, anxiety, worries, and especially the tips against conflicts can help with the uncomfortable, tense feelings that can arise while living in close quarters before they escalate to violence.