



## Ten Coping Strategies for older Oregonians during COVID-19

Communities + Generations + Innovations



### Give Yourself Moments of Privacy

You might feel you have more than enough time alone. However, if you are cooped up with someone else or family, privacy may be a rare coin.

Cabin fever is a real: Mental health experts tell us that anxiety, extreme frustration and depression can hit three critical components of mental health: our sense of autonomy, our connections to others, and our feelings of competency and ability to manage.

We take for granted that our well-being is a continuous reservoir from which to draw. But everyone has a limit.

If you find yourself caring for others, experts agree that sound mental health depends on maintaining boundaries and having some space or time for yourself. In this pandemic, family members, children and parents may expect you to be ever present and quick to respond because, well, you have always been there. Past experience simply lends itself to that expectation. Juggling everyone's needs can gobble up every spare minute of your day. Add to that personal feelings of guilt and obligation, and the drive to fly in and save the day, and your reserves will predictably run dry.

Private alone time may feel impossible to achieve. But even small moments of complete privacy can help. Here are some ideas we've heard people are trying:

- Find alone time in **mini chores**: taking out the garbage, sweeping the sidewalk, cooking, walking the dog.
- **Sit in the car**. No need to go anywhere. Listen to the radio. Remind yourself that someday you will all pile in the car and go to the beach or the park. This will end.
- **Shut the door**. To your bedroom, the bathroom, the laundry room. Find a physical space you do not have to share with anyone. Even if it is just for a few minutes.
- **Screen time is not alone time**. It may be tempting to sit in front of the television for weeks, but the "news" is bottomless. Try to notice how a news binge makes you feel. Do you really need more of that?
- **The same goes for social media**. Did you ever hear of anyone who swiped to the bottom of Facebook?
- **Keep a "corona journal"** or scrapbook in which you can jot down your and your family's experiences. Journaling can help you see the most important things, gain some sense of feeling that the coronavirus outbreak is a historical event that we will get through as others have before us. A scrapbook might be something the children can read someday to their children about the great pandemic of 2020.

- If you are WFH (working from home) consider temporarily **changing your style of working**. Instead of tackling a project for three hours, break up the day more to give yourself smaller chunks of time to fully concentrate while also giving others the attention they need. If you have children in the home, honor the fact that their attention spans are short, so your work will likely need match their rhythms. Expect that you may need to continue working after they've gone to bed or wake up earlier in the morning to get more uninterrupted hours in.
- **Be mindful** of when you are hitting a "wall" and start behaving in ways you don't like. Do you have predictable triggers or times of day when you start to lose it? A good time to take that break.
- **Keep your boundaries**, the lines and limits that – when held firm – contribute to feelings of safety and well-being. Understand what your boundaries are. They will help keep you sane and less overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and worry.

As this period of social distancing and lock down drags on, it will become easy to think of one another as a burden, especially when we are housebound or when isolation breeds feelings of abandonment. Maintaining boundaries and giving ourselves privacy may feel wrong-headed or selfish. But our wells must be replenished.

**You have permission.**