



Communities + Generations + Innovations

Ten Coping Strategies for older Oregonians during COVID-19



Find Your Words

When will this time of trouble be over? Whatever today's confusing graphs and charts tell us, at some point the lines will bend toward the other side. We will come through and we will be changed. As we tell our children, trials are learning experiences and the things that make us stronger.

What can we as adults learn on this unexpected journey? The more we are aware of our feelings, knee-jerk reactions, defense mechanisms, and relationship dynamics, the better we will be in taking care of ourselves and others. Here are some ways to do this:

Start a daily journal

Use prompts to build your self-awareness like:

- What went well today?
- What did I learn today that will help me be a better parent/ partner/friend?
- One thing I appreciate is...
- An emotion I experienced today was..., and I felt this way because...
- One thing that inspired me today was...
- What didn't work today? What can I learn from that?
- One thing I learned about myself today is...
- A small win today was...

The physical act of writing is calming for many people, but keeping a journal doesn't have to be traditional. You can also create a physical or digital space that collects video entries, sketch notes, photographs, audio entries.

Join peer support community

For instance, on Facebook. You will have the opportunity to share your experiences through this crisis, reflect on what it means, and present problems and solutions to the group.

Meet up with friends (virtually, for now)

Identify someone you trust who has a constructive point of view and a healthy emotional intelligence. Make a plan to meet online or by phone to discuss what this crisis is teaching you about yourself, your children, your family, and your community. Same time, same "place" works best. If conversation lags, try using the journal prompts above.

Find your words

Each of these suggestions share one idea: Words and language help us soothe the swirl of thoughts and feelings in our heads. Stories with their beginnings, middles and ends are our brain's sense-making tool. Thus, they can help us find a path through an unfamiliar time.

Because so many of us are accustomed to being distracted and entertained, finding our own words may be hard. The reward is a journey of social and emotional learning through which adults—and children—understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

It's spring in Oregon, the longest season. Here are a poet's words of hope.

The bud

stands for all things,

even for those things that don't flower,

for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;

though sometimes it is necessary

to reteach a thing its loveliness,

to put a hand on its brow

of the flower

*and **retell it in words** and in touch*

it is lovely

until it flowers again...

--Galway Kinnel, "Saint Francis and the Sow" 2002