

EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM

## A Healthy Outlook

## Coronavirus and Intimate Partner Violence

According to Amanda Taub from the New York Times, "Add another public health crisis to the toll of the new coronavirus: Mounting data suggests that intimate partner abuse is acting like an opportunistic infection, flourishing in the conditions created by the pandemic." With that in mind, here are some resources available to those of you living with intimate partner violence:

- **THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP).** For the in-house program, call us at **240-314-1040** or email us at Jeffrey Becker, LCSW-C or Robyn Rosenbauer, LCSW-C. For the external EAP, **KEPRO**, dial **866-496-9599**. The EAP is a great first step when looking for confidential support. Further information about the EAP is on our website at <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap/>
- **THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER (FJC): 240-773-0444.** The FJC of Rockville offers free relief and resources for victims of family violence and their children. The Center collaborates with agencies for advocacy as well as law enforcement and legal and social services. The Center has a playroom with snacks for

children, while meetings are taking place. To find out more about the resources they offer, please visit their website at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/fjc/>

- **THE ABUSED PERSONS PROGRAM: 240-777-4673.** This program offers free counseling, shelter, and support to victims of partner violence and domestic abuse in Montgomery County.
- **NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE: 1-800-799-7233.** You can also go to their website for a live chat. If you are in a situation where you are unable to speak safely, you can text LOVEIS to 22522. However, in case of an emergency, people should not hesitate to dial 911.
- **Useful Links:**
  - Resources in Montgomery County
  - National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statistics
  - Domestic Violence Overview, Laws Definition
  - Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations During COVID-19 ●

*"In three words I can  
sum up everything  
I've learned about life.  
It goes on."*

*Robert Frost*

## ASK THE EAP

**Q.** Is the EAP open during the summer?

**A.** Yes. The EAP will remain open during the summer months. You can reach the in-house EAP at 240-314-1040 or by emailing Jeffrey Becker, LCSW-C or Robyn Rosenbauer, LCSW-C. You can schedule an appointment for a telephonic or Zoom session during the period we work remotely. Also, you can reach the external EAP, KEPRO, at 866-496-9599.

Summer is also a great time to check out our websites. For MCPS in-house, go to [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap). It is full of information about the EAP and the services we provide as well as resources related to personal issues and concerns you might be experiencing. For KEPRO, go to [EAPhelplink.com](http://EAPhelplink.com) for webinars and resources ranging from legal and eldercare to informational articles and webinars.

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send us your questions via Outlook or through the Pony to Jeffrey Becker. ●

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## Nurture Your Emotional Health

**T**aking care of your physical health by eating right and exercising during this extremely stressful time is more important than ever. So is taking care of your emotional health and having a sense of happiness and well-being. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines well-being as judging life positively and feeling good.

According to the CDC, higher levels of well-being are linked to the following:

- A lower risk of disease, illness, and injury (and speedier recovery);
- A better-functioning immune system;
- Longer life;
- More productivity at work.

In other words, staying positive and happy can go a long way toward protecting your overall health. There are things you can do to achieve a greater sense of well-being, including these tips from the Mental Health America website:

- Spend time with family and friends, and look for ways to meet new people.
- Focus on the positive experiences in your life.
- Get regular physical activity, and eat a healthy diet that includes lots of vegetables and fruits.
- Do something nice for someone else.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Laugh more. Do things you like.

- Focus on your spiritual side, whether that means participating in organized religion, communing with nature, meditating, creating art, or whatever speaks to you.

If you feel unable to get or stay happy, you may benefit from professional help, and you may want to consider making an appointment to see a doctor. Treatment, including medicines, counseling, or a combination, can improve quality of life.

*Adapted from an article by Stacy Simon, senior editor, news, from the American Cancer Society. For more information, go to <http://www.cancer.org/latest-news/nurture-your-emotional-health.html>* ●

## Living with Uncertainty

**T**he past few weeks have been filled with anxiety and uncertainty, due to Covid-19.

Daily life has changed rapidly. Even when change is anticipated, there may be a sense of giving something up or letting something go that may feel like a loss. Without the familiar to rely on, you may feel cut off and out of control. It is normal right now to feel discomfort, distress, uneasiness, and anxiety.

### ● Tips for Living with Uncertainty

#### 1. ACCEPT THAT UNCERTAINTY IS

**A CERTAIN THING.** You cannot know how everything is going to unfold. Even things you feel so sure of and dependent on can change. Being aware that things may change can help you to cope

if things happen that you did not expect.

#### 2. ZERO IN ON WHAT YOU CAN

**CONTROL.** Even while you are going through change and uncertainty, there are many aspects of your life you can count on to stay stable and reliable. Identify the aspects you can control and use them as a framework to build the rest of your life around.

#### 3. ESTABLISH A DAILY ROUTINE

**THAT HELPS YOU MOVE THROUGH YOUR DAY.** Your habits and familiar activities will help you feel more grounded, even when things feel up in the air. Habits and routines provide a safety net, something to help you not feel your life is in freefall.

#### 4. SUSPEND EXPECTATIONS.

Having specific expectations of what should happen is often not realistic. Try to accept that life is temporarily different and that things do not feel “normal” right now.

#### 5. YOUR THOUGHTS CAN INFLUENCE HOW MUCH STRESS YOU

**FEEL.** Try not to focus on the worst-case scenario. Limit your use of social media and the news, if those things are causing you distress. Try to spend a few minutes a day doing breathing exercises and meditating on something positive.

If you find that worry and anxiety are getting the best of you, please contact the MCPS Employee Assistance Program, 240-314-104, for a confidential consultation. ●

# Healthy Sleep Tips

**M**illions of people suffered from insomnia prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, and unfortunately, the pandemic created a variety of new challenges, even for people who previously had no sleeping problems.

The coronavirus pandemic does not affect everyone in the same way. Of course, patients with the virus and frontline medical workers face the brunt of the direct impacts of the disease. But, as we have seen across the world, the consequences have spread far and wide, and pose significant barriers to sleep.

Healthy sleep habits—also referred to as having good “sleep hygiene”—can make a positive difference in your quality of life. Incorporate the following practices in your sleep routine for a good night’s sleep:

**STICK TO THE SAME BEDTIME AND WAKE-UP TIME, EVEN ON THE WEEKENDS**—This helps to regulate your body clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep throughout the night.

**HAVE A RELAXING BEDTIME RITUAL**—A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime, conducted away from bright lights, helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress, or anxiety, which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep, or remain asleep.

**AVOID NAPS, ESPECIALLY IN THE AFTERNOON**—Power napping may help you get through the day, but if you find that you cannot fall asleep at bedtime, eliminating even short catnaps may help.

**EXERCISE DAILY**—Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. Exercise at any time of day, but not at the expense of your sleep.

**EVALUATE YOUR ROOM**—Design your sleep environment to accommodate your needs for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool—between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. Your bedroom also should be free from any noise that can disturb your sleep. Finally, your bedroom should not have any light. Check your room for noises and other distractions. This includes a bed partner’s sleep disruptions such as snoring. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, “white noise” machines, humidifiers, fans, and other devices.

**SLEEP ON A COMFORTABLE MATTRESS AND PILLOWS**—Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy—about 9 or 10 years for most good-quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep, but also free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

**USE BRIGHT LIGHT TO HELP MANAGE YOUR CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS**—Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning. This will keep your circadian rhythms in check.

**AVOID ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES, AND HEAVY MEALS IN THE EVENING**—Alcohol, cigarettes, and caffeine can disrupt sleep. Eating big or spicy meals can cause discomfort from indigestion that can make it hard to sleep. It is good to finish eating at least two to three hours before bedtime.

**WIND DOWN. YOUR BODY NEEDS TIME TO SHIFT INTO SLEEP MODE, SO SPEND THE LAST HOUR BEFORE BED DOING A CALMING ACTIVITY, SUCH AS READING**—For some people, using an electronic device such as a laptop can make it hard to fall asleep, because the particular type of light emanating from the screens of those devices is activating to the brain. If you have trouble sleeping, avoid electronics before bed and in the middle of the night.

**IF YOU CANNOT SLEEP, GO INTO ANOTHER ROOM AND DO SOMETHING RELAXING UNTIL YOU FEEL TIRED**—It is best to take work materials, computers, and televisions out of the sleeping environment. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine.

If you are still having trouble sleeping, do not hesitate to speak with your doctor or find a sleep professional. You also may benefit from recording your sleep in a sleep diary to help you better evaluate common patterns or issues you may notice with your sleep or sleeping habits.

*Article adapted from the National Sleep Foundation. For more information on sleep, go to their website at <http://sleepfoundation.org/>* ●

# Creating Healthy Habits During Social Isolation

**A**ccording to Sean Covey, Franklin Covey best-selling author, “Depending on what they are, our habits will either make us or break us. We become what we repeatedly do.” With so many changes in our daily lives, this raises the question of what happens to our old habits and what habits might we have now? We have been socially isolating for a while now and have some new habits already. What needs to be adjusted? What can be carried forward when life returns to a new normal? Here are some “habit” areas to consider:

**FIND STRUCTURE**—The assurance of a structured routine can calm nerves without us even realizing it. It can be calming to create some consistency and stick with it.

**KEEP UP YOUR APPEARANCE**—Get dressed every day. Pay attention to hygiene.

**DO NOT BE A COUCH POTATO**—With appropriate precautions, it can be safe to go outside and move around. There are many health benefits to being outside in the sunlight and fresh air. If the weather is bad, you can walk around the house, go up and down steps, or get ideas from watching exercise videos. Being active can help reduce stress and improve your mood.

## MAINTAIN GOOD SLEEP

**HYGIENE**—Keep a regular bedtime routine. Your immune system is most active during natural, deep sleep.

**MAINTAIN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**—Call or video-chat with a family member or friend. People have different needs regarding social interaction. However, no matter how introverted you may be, it is important to avoid becoming socially isolated.

**INCORPORATE SOME RELAXATION IN YOUR LIFE**—Try listening to some relaxation and meditation apps like Buddhify, Headspace, Calm, MindShift or podcasts like Meditation Break, 3 Minute Hypnosis, and My Meditation Station.

**TAKE A BREAK**—If possible, give yourself permission to be nonproductive for 30 minutes and watch a movie, listen to a podcast, take a nap, etc.

**GET BUSY**—Take care of some things at home. Being busy can be very soothing to the mind, getting us out of a more stressful mindset. Declutter something, do some gardening, get your financial and other important papers in order, work on your car, fix something in your house that you have been meaning to take care of. There is plenty to do.

## DO MORE COOKING

—Home cooking from scratch is considered to be a good indicator of healthful eating. If you have not cooked much in the past, now is a good time to try to increase your repertoire. You will save money by not eating out as much and you will eat healthier too.

**EAT WELL**—This is related to cooking more. It is helpful to know what and how much you are eating. Are you gaining or losing weight without trying to? Watching what you eat becomes more important now, especially if you are less active. No matter what kind of diet you are on, binging on sugary or fatty foods is not a good idea.

**AVOID UNHEALTHY HABITS**—Avoid increasing your use of alcohol; try to avoid increased smoking, including vaping; and stay away from too much caffeine.

As we move away from heavy restrictions, think about those habits you cannot wait to get back to. But, also consider those habits you developed during this time of staying at home that you would like to keep. You can take them with you when there is a new normal. ●

## A HEALTHY OUTLOOK

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**Important Notice:** Information in *A Healthy Outlook* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to [Jeffrey\\_Becker@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org)  
Please note that email is not necessarily confidential.

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with life's challenges—  
BIG OR SMALL*