

DOING THE JOB FROM HOME: ADJUSTING TO REMOTE WORK DURING A PANDEMIC



IN THIS ISSUE

by Jamie Leslie

PAGE TWO

*Supporting
Your Essential Workers*
by Jamie Leslie

PAGE THREE

*Mental Health Tips for Times
of Change and Uncertainty*
by Jamie Leslie

PAGE FOUR

*Telehealth during
COVID-19*
by Jamie Leslie

PAGE FIVE

*Continuation of Doing the Job
From Home*
by Jamie Leslie

For many of us in Wyoming, our world was thrown off the weekend before St. Patrick's Day. During the span of two days, we saw various conferences, plays, conventions, play-offs, and other community events canceled. We watched as school districts, offices and various other businesses were thrust into making decisions about closing or changing up their services to slow the spread of COVID-19. Many of us were also put into the position of working remotely from home. These increasing changes have inevitably caused various aspect of adjustment and mental health concerns.

The reality is that we are collectively grieving as a nation and as a world due to the many changes that COVID-19 has forced upon us. We grieve the loss of lives. We grieve the loss of jobs and economic uncertainty. And yes, we grieve the many different parts of what we saw as normalcy (being able to eat out, going to the grocery store without wearing a mask, chatting with students or co-workers, shaking hands with people outside our homes, etc.). So, add this grief on top of anxiety with the uncertainty of our changing world and working remotely from home and you have yourself a good recipe for Generalized Anxiety Disorder or even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

So here are some suggestions to help adjust to working from home. Why? Because we all need some sense of something that we can control. It builds up resilience to focus on the actions we can take in a world that we cannot control. It helps empower us and it helps build hope.

(continued on page 5)



www.threetrailsefap.org
threetrails@threetrailsefap.org



Three Trails EFAP
812 South David Street
Casper, WY 82601



P: 307.237.5750
F: 307.237.5772

Supporting Your Essential Workers

by Jamie Leslie

As a Country, we have come to realize that our essential workers are holding a large emotional and physical load as they provide us with health care, groceries, civil safety, packages, and various supplies. Shout out to the police officers, postal workers, FedEx drivers, grocery store clerks, nurses, doctors, EMT workers, truck drivers and so many more in various essential fields that go into work daily and risk increased exposure to COVID-19. Collectively I have seen an amazing act of support for our essential workers and was asked by a friend what we can do to emotionally support them.



First a big support that I have noticed is so many are taking it upon themselves to sew masks, gowns and utilize 3D printers for making masks and other PPE. This helps provide a viable resource needed for essential workers to be able to do their jobs without increased risk of infection. When we do our work duties, we tend to be more motivated and we function at a higher level cognitively if we have resources to be able to complete the job tasks. So, this is also emotionally supporting our essential workers by relieving the stress and hypervigilance about having to perform a task without the necessary protective equipment.

Also, it emotionally supports our essential workers if we follow the recommended social distancing recommendations. Some individuals are not respecting this when they go to the grocery stores and it can feel threatening to grocery store staff when patrons do not follow the social distance recommendations. A big reason for the social distancing is also to lesson the spread so our health care facilities do not become overwhelmed with patients. We do not have enough health care workers, beds, or ventilators to handle a large outbreak of COVID-19.

We have all felt a sense of being overwhelmed with impossible tasks. All of us at some point in our lives have experienced that sense of anxiety and panic feeling when we have a large task that may be impossible to complete but comes with it a strong level of risk if we don't fix it. This is the emotional element that perhaps some in the health care field are experiencing (certainly in New York and Italy). It will lead to burn out, acute stress disorder and eventually post traumatic stress disorder. By respecting the social distancing recommendations, we are supporting our essential workers. We are not being a part of the problem that could end up infecting them and their families. We need to recognize that our actions impact others and work to be accountable.

Other avenues I have notice that emotionally support our essential works is building up on their moral. The Howl for Casper group on Facebook goes out at 8pm every night and howls for the essential workers. This reminds us that we are not alone in this chaotic world and boasts general moral. Also, the amazing group called Occasions by Cory is working to feed the frontlines in our community. If you want to support them, I believe they are taking donations to continue this effort to use community restaurants to feed various organizations. Just think about a time someone may have went out of their way to show their gratitude and recognize the amazing work and value you have. Did it boost your motivation to keep doing your job? Did it give you a sense of purpose and connection? That is what these amazing acts are doing for our essential workers.

I am so proud to see these examples and encourage our community to continue doing their part to support our essential workers. We are a holistic community and have seen how COVID-19 impacts all of us. COVID-19 has dealt a strong cost to us all economically, emotionally, and physically but it is in our circle of control with how we treat others and ourselves during this time. Our actions have a big impact on us getting through this pandemic. And our actions can have a big impact on lessening the emotional tole that our essential workers may be experiencing as they continue to put themselves and their families at risk to provide health, safety, and balance. Please do not be a part of the problem and the reason why they may get infected themselves or need future trauma counseling. Be instead the positive change you wish to see in this world.



Mental Health Tips for Times of Change and Uncertainty

by Jamie Leslie

Extreme changes and uncertainty can cause an increased sense or hypervigilance. Hypervigilance is defined in Wikipedia as an enhanced state of sensory sensitivity accompanied by an exaggerated intensity of behaviors whose purpose is to detect activity. Hypervigilance may bring about a state of increased anxiety which can cause exhaustion. This can increase the somatic symptoms of muscle tension, stomach issues, grinding teeth, and insomnia. The following are some mental health tips to help lessen the anxiety symptoms that may be experienced during times of change and uncertainty.

1. Set boundaries on how often you watch news. This is not in an endeavor to not be an informed viewer but to lessen mental health suffering. Consider reading the news instead and set a scheduled time that you will do this. If you read or watch it right before bed, you may experience an increase in anxiety and set yourself up for a night of rumination and even possible panic attacks.

2. Set boundaries on how frequently you scroll through Facebook. This can be a similar boundary that you set with watching news. Although Facebook can increase our connection it also increases a sense of anxiety and anger when we see posts that do not align with our set of core beliefs. Also reading the comment section of social media news posts can increase our anger towards our fellow man as all we may see are toxic shame filled comments aimed at bullying others or gaslighting others.

3. Schedule frequent self-care. Our usual daily routines of self-care may be thrown off as we have limits to where we can go. It helps to set up a routine, while you are social distancing, to allow yourself to walk around your neighborhood. I highly recommend looking at developing an at home yoga routine. There are several free exercise videos now available on YouTube (even Chris Hemsworth has put some out).

4. Add mindfulness or meditation to your daily self-care. Mindfulness uses the five senses to help ground us and keeps us in the cognitive part of our brain. If interested, google mindfulness and you can find various free mindfulness exercises. If you want a paid app for mindfulness look at the Calm app and let your mind go. Meditation may involve a practice of focusing on a mantra or even some sets of relaxed breathing to help lessen mental health suffering. For individuals who want to add some spirituality to their practice, prayer has been shown to activate the same cognitive parts of the brain that meditation and mindfulness activate. It can decrease anxiety symptoms and holistically help individuals increase a spiritual connection.

5. Utilize essential oils for baths, diffusers or even as lotions. Some essential oils can provide a sense of relaxation as we smell them. Known essential oils to have a relaxing and calming reaction include Lavender or Mellissa Oil (basically Lemon Balm). Other essential oils that can have an uplifting reaction may include Orange, Lemon, Grapefruit or Peppermint. If you have a diffuser, you can run them daily. You can also add them to warm bathwater or add them to some coconut oil and rub them on your skin.

6. Practice Altruism. Altruism involves unselfish acts of kindness. It increases our connection and helps increase a sense of purpose and meaning. It is shown to help battle depression and anxiety. Plus it is highly needed right now in our current society where so many people are needing compassion and empathy.



Telehealth during COVID-19

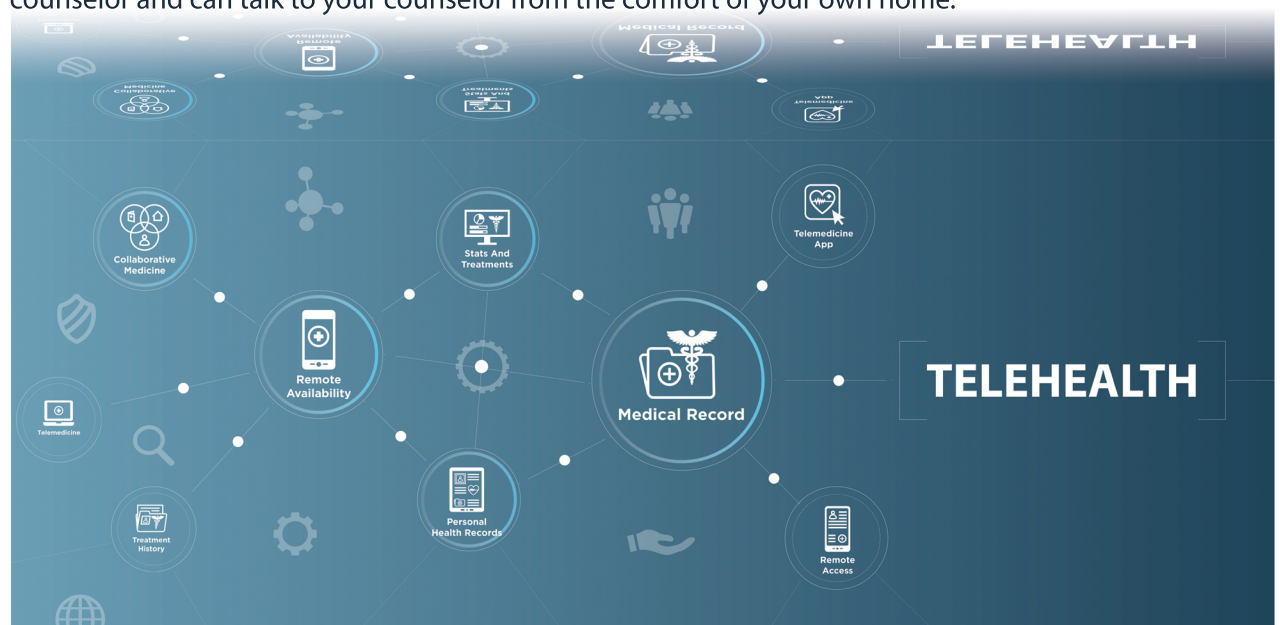
Three Trails is still providing therapeutic sessions utilizing telehealth. Telehealth generally involves the use of over the phone or the use of electronic video counseling. If you are wanting to set up an appointment to talk to a counselor here are some instructions in how to follow through with a scheduled appointment and how to set up a new appointment.

We have one staffed member at the center who is answering calls and trying her best to get scheduled clients set up with the Telehealth services. She is answering phones from 10am – 3pm on Monday – Thursday and 9am -1pm on Fridays (307-237-5750). She is the only one there, so if you get the answering machine please leave a clear message with a contact phone number and understand that she may not be able to return your phone call in a timely manner as she is also working on getting scheduled clients set up with the telehealth services.

If you currently have a scheduled appointment with Three Trails, the receptionists is contacting mainly via text, that way she can contact as many people as possible. She needs a valid email address from you. Once she gets an email address, she will email you. In the email, it will contain instructions on what the telehealth services look like. It also will have a consent form attached with it. The email address she is emailing you from is an encrypted email provider. The full email address is threetrails@hushmail.com. Please do not email this address with questions, as she may not be able to respond in a timely manner. I just want you to be aware of the email address that the consent form will be coming from. Please also monitor your junk or spam mail. The encrypted email allows you to sign the consent form electronically. If you are not able to sign electronically you can also print it off and put in our mailbox at 812 south David street. You can also take a picture of the signed consent form and text it to the office cell phone that Trish uses to contact you. It is important that it is signed and returned 48hr (business days) before your established appointments. This allows us to set the schedule in a timely manner for counselors. If she has not heard back from you when she texts you, the next step she is trying is to call you.

If you do not have a scheduled appointment with Three Trails, you can of course call to schedule an appointment. Keep in mind the hours listed above for when the receptionist is answering the phones. If you need to leave a message, please include your full name, your phone number and clearly spell out your email address. If you are a new client, Trish will be getting basic intake information from you over the phone. Please do not text Trish with a signed consent form or email a signed consent form until you have a scheduled appointment. I ask this, to lesson confusion she would have in trying to solidify scheduled client's appointments.

We are not able to provide guaranteed same day appointments, but we will work to get you in a timely manner. Once you have completed a telehealth session with your counselor, you can call the office to schedule your next follow up appointment. The nice part is that you do not have to drive to talk to your counselor and can talk to your counselor from the comfort of your own home.



(continued from page 1 - *Doing the Job from Home: Adjusting to Remote Work During a Pandemic*)

First off, I want to be transparent that I will be using myself as an example. For I too am working remotely utilizing telehealth for clients. Even though I may be a mental health counselor, I am also a human being. I too am experiencing a level of hypervigilance that I did not previously experience and an increased sense of anxiety with the ever-changing world.

For myself, the hardest part of the transition was trying to develop the new service of telehealth. I imagine this may have been something that was also experienced by school district employees as they started to develop teaching curriculum utilizing a google classroom or zoom platform. It is normal to feel overwhelmed as you are trying to create something you have never done before. And you may have felt internal or external pressure to have it in place in a short amount of time.

What does not work is to throw yourself into trying to get it all done at once. I attempted this during the first three days of the week we where closed and trust me it increases your mental health suffering. What works is to chunk it down and set up a daily schedule of what you are going to realistically work on. For myself, it helped to see one part of the large task to get done and give myself permission to save the rest of the large task for another day. I call this eating the elephant one piece at a time. If you forced yourself to eat the whole elephant in one sitting, you would get sick to your stomach and not accomplish much. So, you must set realistic limitations that you can manage.

You may have also experienced changes with your external stressors while trying to get a new system in place for remote work. If you have children, you most likely had your usual resources of school and daycare changed. What works is to utilize resources that you might have to help with childcare. However, we all have different family lives and not everyone has the resources to help us with this, so getting creative with develop a task for our own children or establishing an area of the house that was far removed from other family members can help.

I would highly encourage you to designate one area as your work zone. Before all of this occurred, we had the beauty of changed environment that helped us compartmentalize work from home. Our workplace provided a separation from our home and vice a versa. Now that is thrown off. To help provide this compartmentalization, set up one spot that you will be using for work purposes. This is important, because your brain starts to develop a set of how it behaves based on your environment. If you use your bed to work on tasks, you will find that your brain has a hard time relaxing when it is time to sleep. Setting up one workspace will help your brain compartmentalize and lesson the likelihood of you working when you should be sleeping or eating a family meal.

The last piece I truly encourage you to consider is to schedule time for self-care. If you spend a full 8 hours just throwing yourself into your work tasks, you increase anxiety and likelihood of developing sleep induced insomnia. For myself, I had to do this so I could be a more balanced counselor, executive director, and mom. I think it is common to throw ourselves into just doing the job because well it is a pandemic and that causes a manic energy to swell up and increases our adrenaline. But now is also a time when we need to hold space for self-care. The socially acceptable expectations to be a workaholic are toxic and has become too much of a norm. Now can be a time to make meaning of the value of taking care of yourself so you can take care of others.

It helped for me to schedule a time that I would exercise. If I did that then, I was more likely to follow through with self-care. Exercise is important as a daily part of self-care because it increases endorphins and helps you ground emotionally. Some types of exercise to consider would be yoga or even just walking around your neighborhood block.

Hopefully, these tips will give you ideas of what you can do to find some sense of balance in a time of chaos while you work remotely from home. Three Trails EFAP is providing telehealth and can still emotionally support you during this time. If you need to schedule an appointment you can call our office.

The main hours that the phone (307-237-5750) is being answered is Monday – Thursday 10am – 3PM and Fridays from 9am – 1pm.

