

A HelpGuide guest article

Finding Joy During Difficult Times

Stressed about the global pandemic, unemployment, financial uncertainty, or civil unrest? Even in these tough times, you can find joy in your daily life and improve your outlook.



Now more than ever, finding joy in your day-to-day experiences can improve your quality of life and enhance and protect your mental health. As many of us are mired in intense and heavy information from the news and social media, possible long-term shelter-in-place orders, financial instability, and political and civil unrest, it's become more and more difficult to find peace—both internally and externally. Furthermore, for many adults who are working from home while taking on new roles and responsibilities for their children's

academic needs, a newfound stress in the home is ever present. How can we, both individually and as a collective, “spark joy” to lift our own and each other’s spirits to get through this global crisis?

Tips for finding joy in your life

Here are some ideas to give you a pick me up:

Listen to your favorite music. It can help you recall positive memories, providing an escape from the day-to-day difficulties you may be facing. Recalling these memories by listening to music is an easy and passive way to boost your mood while you’re working, cleaning, or just hanging out at home. Research has shown that listening to your favorite jams can reduce anxiety, [lower blood pressure](#), [improve sleep quality](#), and enhance mood, too.

Develop a daily gratitude practice. It doesn’t have to be a big ordeal; just think of one to three simple statements a day such as, “I am grateful I have a roof over my head,” “I am grateful for the sun that rises each morning that I feel on my skin,” or “I am grateful for the delicious strawberries I had today.” At the end of each day, write in a journal or say aloud the things you were grateful for, as simple as they may be. By doing this, even during the most difficult or distressing times, your gratitude practice will help bring your circumstances into perspective, indirectly create joy, and keep you grounded.

Spend time in a vision practice. Close your eyes and focus on your very favorite place, person, mantra, prayer, or even vacation. Breathe into the moment and envision yourself in this space or situation. Consider the colors, tastes, textures, and conversations. Try to spend a dedicated five minutes soaking in the moment, slowing down your breathing and relaxing your body. Some people find that this practice is enhanced either by laying down with bolsters under the legs and a weighted blanket on top of the body or by sitting in a chair with a cushion behind the back and under the feet. [Meditating regularly](#) in this way can help remind you that aspects of the COVID-19 situation—such as isolation, sadness, and desperation—are temporary. You will once again have more positive experiences, and these short meditations may even help you create new ones.

Find the “awe” moment every day. “Awe” is the concept of experiencing wonder and amazement. Awe frequently conjures up the idea of something “big” like snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef or seeing the Eiffel Tower in Paris. However, researchers are finding that if we take the time to notice small, pleasurable moments every day, we can reap the same benefits. Awe moments can be found in seeing the sun rise, for example, or watching

ants march. We can also experience “awe” by reading beautiful poetry or hiking on a new path and seeing interesting rocks or flowers. Take the time to notice things around you that you may have taken for granted. By relishing them and their place in the world (and yours), you can derive more meaning from your life, feel more connected to the world at large, and experience more joy in the day to day.

Tips for helping others experience joy

The following ideas can help others experience joy. Since helping others is one of the best ways to feel happier and healthier yourself, when they feel joy, you will, too.

Send letters, poems, or drawings to first responders, essential workers, or elderly people who are sheltered in-place. By engaging in this activity, you are bringing a sense of comfort and joy to others and giving yourself a feeling of fulfillment for having passed on some happiness to others. Additionally, it can help shift your attention away from your own day-to-day struggles and the heaviness you may be feeling.

Start collecting spare change or a small amount of money every day, with the intention of donating it to a charity of your choice. At the end of a designated period of time (one to three months), write a letter to the charity letting them know what you did, why, and the meaning behind the donation. Saving the money and seeing the fruits of your labor will spark joy that you were able to meet a goal. Additionally, by writing a letter you’ll be able to express your intentions of goodwill to another. Oftentimes, when we voice our positivity instead of keeping it inside, we can further feel joy throughout our soul.

Run an errand for a friend or order food for them. Helping others with even something small can be a big stress reducer right now. They will be so thankful. And from their gratitude, you’ll experience a sense of joy—as will they.

Let your joy be in your journey

As you can see, experiencing joy, even in light of all the difficulties we are facing at this time both personally and collectively, can be achieved by some easy modifications to our day-to-day activities.

“Let your joy be in your journey—not in some distant goal”—Tim Cook

Author: Stephanie Mihalas, Ph.D. Last updated: July 2020.

Stephanie Mihalas, Ph.D., NCSP, ABPP, is a licensed and board certified psychologist, a nationally certified school psychologist, and the founder of [The Center for Well Being](#) in Los Angeles, CA. Dr. Mihalas is also a Board Member of HelpGuide.org International.