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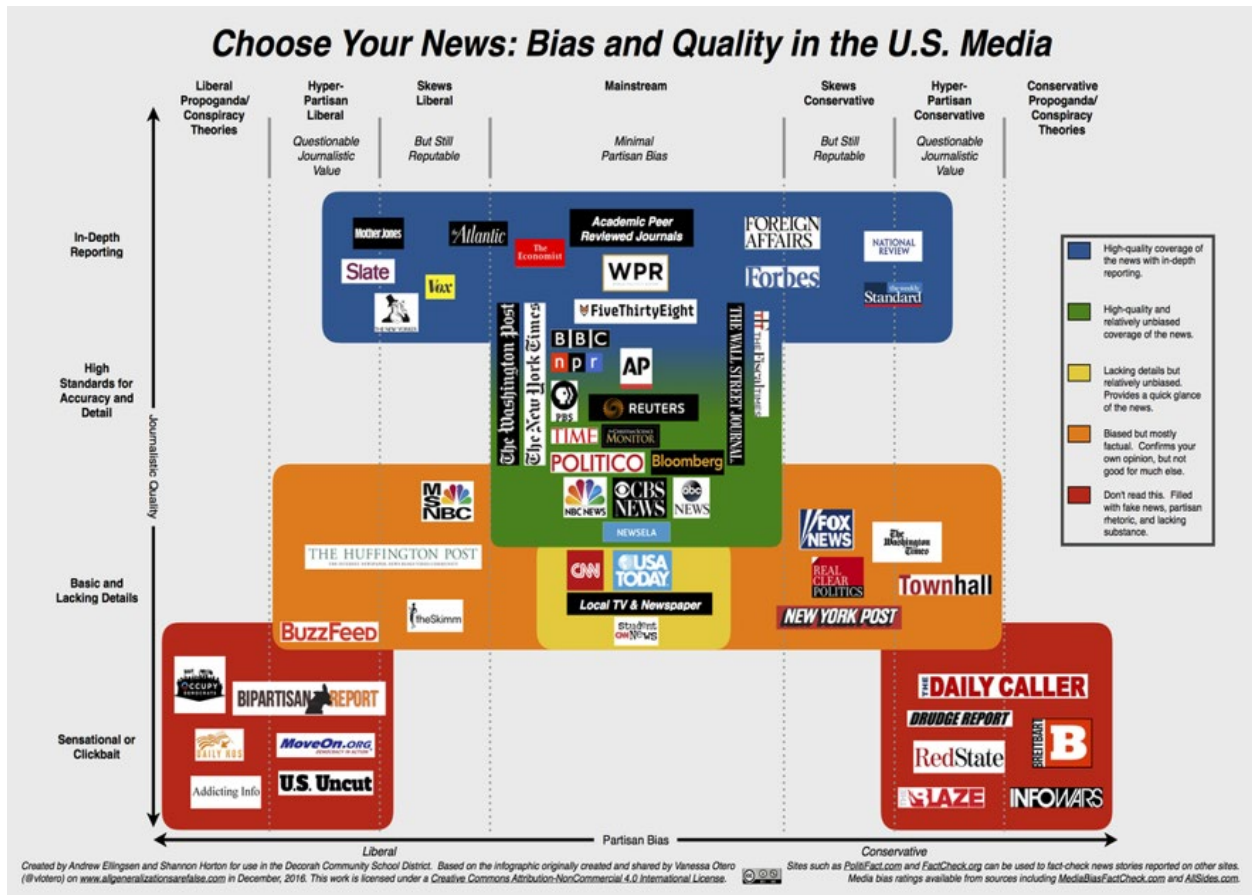
Managing Stress while Working from Home during the Pandemic: Strategies for Self-Care (Blog Post)

Posted on June 30, 2020

Stress is often driven by feeling a lack of control over things you once had control over. This lack of control can create feelings of anxiety, depression, and even anger. This blog post highlights some elements of self-care that can help you stay present and regain a sense of control where you can.

Manage your newsfeed

How much information are you consuming about the pandemic? Too much news can add to your stress. Try to minimize your consumption of news about the outbreak to once a day, preferably in print format (e.g. magazines, newspapers) and limit your exposure to media that fuels fears (more likely on cable news or from organizations that cater to extreme perspectives, see the image below). Additionally, evaluate your sources for getting information about the pandemic and be aware of the biases held by these news sources. Seek information directly from credible sources such as WHO and CDC and follow their guidelines.



Stay connected

Make a plan to stay connected to friends and family – this may be at home with the people you live with or virtually. Use social media to host or engage in virtual happy hours with friends and family or simply blocking out times to chat. Another important part of this plan could be communicating with your children about the pandemic in an open, age-appropriate way and be sure to address their concerns. No matter what specific things are in your plan to cope, remember to keep things in perspective; do not dwell on worst case scenarios, but rather practice optimism and retain hope for the future.

Physical activities

Staying physically active is critical to your overall health but is also related to how you are able to manage stress.

- A healthy body can help you cope better and there are a number of evidence-based strategies to boost immune health such as: eating a balanced diet; drinking eight glasses of water a day; washing hands frequently; getting plenty of sunshine; making exercise a priority; getting adequate sleep; limiting alcohol; having sex; spending time with animals; eliminating inflammatory foods; laughing often; mediating/breathing exercises; and practicing gratitude.
- Consider the following activities to stay active while staying safe: Yoga (combines physical/cognitive/psychological self-care); walking/running/biking in your immediate neighborhood; climbing stairs; indoor exercise equipment (e.g., treadmill, elliptical machine, bike); strength training (weights, sit ups, pushups, squats); and exercise videos on YouTube or other streaming services. Set small, reasonable goals and really prioritize your health and well-being.
- Sleep is critical to your physical and mental health but may be difficult during a pandemic due to anxiety, disrupted schedule/routine, and other barriers. Good sleep hygiene practices include: going to bed and waking up at the same time every day; having a “bedtime routine” that consists of a series of steps that tell your body to begin the process of relaxing/going to sleep (e.g., hygiene, reading, stretching); sleeping in a cool, dark room; limiting blue light/technology in your room and use of technology at least 30 minutes before bed; avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and exercise before bed.

Managing your emotional state

What you think can affect stress and depression. Some of the most common ways of thinking include catastrophizing (i.e., believing that what has happened or will happen will be so awful and unbearable that you won't be able to stand it), having a negative filter (i.e., focusing almost exclusively on the negative and seldom noticing the positive), and making unfair comparisons (e.g., focusing primarily on others who do better than you and finding yourself inferior in the comparison). To combat these negative distortions, reflect on and identify the type of distortion that is at play and look for

evidence to contradict your thoughts about the situation. You can also engage in activities that are pleasurable (e.g., hobby, reading, time outside, music), provide a sense of accomplishment (e.g., make a bed, clean the bathroom, completing a project you've been avoiding), and fit your values (e.g., help someone with yard work/shopping, make a donation) to address depression. Additionally, there are several breathing, body relaxation, and mindfulness techniques that can be used to mitigate stress and anxiety such as:

- **Three part breathing:** Inhale through your nose for count of 3; hold for count of 3; exhale through your mouth for count of 3. Repeat for 10 sets.
- **Finger tracing technique:** Using your pointer finger, trace from your thumb to your pinkie and back. Inhale as you move your tracing finger up one side of finger and exhale down the other side. Repeat and work your way back to thumb for count of 10.
- **Nose breathing rescue technique:** Hold your nose with thumb and pointer finger, one on each nostril. Plug one nostril with your thumb and inhale. While holding your breath, switch and plug other nostril with pointer finger and release the other side. Keep same side plugged and inhale. Switch to your thumb while holding your breath and then exhale on the other side.
- **Body scan technique:** Moving from your feet to your head, spend 10-15 seconds observing each body part and taking a deep breath and imagine the breath going to that part of the body: feet, calves, thighs, abdomen, back, chest, arms, neck, face.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Following the same pattern as above, instead of observing each body part, intentionally tense each body part. Hold for count of 3 then relax for count of 3. Take a deep breath and imagine sending to that part of the body. Continue to work your way up through the list above.
- **Shoulder tension countdown:** Tense your shoulders and arms as tense as possible. Make a fist with both hands. Hold for count of 10. Then gradually, one inch at a time, release for a count of 10.
- **5-4-3-2-1:** Name 5 things you can see; 4 things you can hear; 3 things you can touch; 2 things you can smell; 1 thing you can taste.
- **Visual imagery:** Close your eyes and imagine a place that makes you feel relax and peaceful. What do you see? Hear? What can you touch or feel? What do you smell or taste? How do you feel in that place? Take 10 deep breaths and enjoy being present in that place.

These evidence-based strategies can help combat stress, anxiety, and depression by providing you with a renewed sense of control and allowing your mind to focus on the present. NOTE: some techniques are linked to video demonstrations, sharing these samples does not equate to an endorsement.