

COPING IN QUARANTINE

Living with anxiety or OCD in these conditions can be terrifying, and having spent years obsessing over germs, diseases and viruses, I have come to terms with how to deal with my obsessions, and the compulsions that follow them.

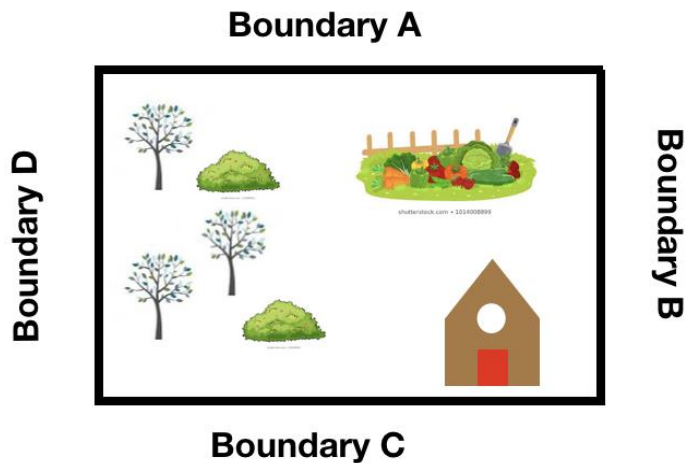
Here are some tips for those suffering with anxiety about COVID-19:

1] Restrict yourself to reading the news once a day, and make sure this is in the morning

- By constantly filling your brain with news articles you are only going to fuel your anxiety/obsession
- The media can be scary and seldom encouraging at times like these. Therefore, limiting your time spent on the media and muting notifications is essential for some
- Stick to the NHS and government recommended websites only
- It's tempting to look more, but only look once in the morning. Then you have the whole day to address any issues you feel you would like to talk about and your sleep will not be compromised by any anxiety which has come about because of a news article

2] Draw/paint/ write about safety

- For me, it was incredibly helpful to establish a place of safety around me. We are in lockdown, and your house and the boundaries surrounding it cannot be intruded by the outside world
- Make sure you make it clear in your head that you are protected from the outside, which may make you feel safer
- Paint, draw or write to yourself explaining/showing the boundaries you are living in, and keep this to look at whenever you are worried
- I like the idea of Lakshman drawing a magic circle of protection around Sita to keep her protected from harm
- If you are worried about relatives/ friends elsewhere, paint, draw or write about their safety circles as well. Here is a hypothetical example:



Or you could write:

From my house there is a brown fence which separates it from public access. This fence travels as far to the end of the fields, where it transfers into a hedge that winds around the fields and joins again with the brown fence that now faces the pool. From the other side there is a road which sits between me and my neighbours.

Or:

There is a fence that sits in front of the road which separates me from the apartments opposite and around me. This fence covers the whole outside of the property and there is a gate which opens to go onto the road. From the back of the house it is four steps to the fence, from the front it is seven and a half steps to the fence where you can see the swing set ... etc

- Notice the use of 'separates' and 'between me' in the writing, and labelling of 'boundary' in the drawing
- These enhance the aspect a safe place because it outlines clearly the circle of protection
- I write and think about our hedges and the height of them as protecting me and my family.

3] Create structure and make time for friends and exercise. Plan what you will do when this is all over and focus self-care

- Structure is so important in order to make one feel in control
- Even though it is the holidays, make sure you get up at a reasonable time. School beginning again will maintain structure which is positive, but in the absence of this it is important to plan your day
- Within this plan, incorporate time with friends and exercise- both of these things can be at home

- HIIT sessions with Joe Wicks or yoga exercises are great in this respect, because they can be done in small or large spaces
- Socialising and exercising will release endorphins into the blood stream and increase feelings of happiness.
- Plan meet ups with your friends for when you get out
- However, don't put a date on this as disappointment over cancellation of events can bring you down, and everything is very ambiguous at the moment
- Instead, plan something without a date, because you can be excited enough to know it will happen, but not face potential disappointment if it does not in the immediate future
- Self-care is so important
- Taking time out of the day, especially before bed, to meditate, moisturise, shower or put on makeup can change the way you feel a surprising amount
- Put as much effort into your appearance as you would on a normal daily basis, and even if that is just having a shower and cleansing your face in the morning then that is absolutely fine

4] Make time to talk to someone about your worries, but keep it structured and regular

- Especially in the case of those with OCD, obsessive thoughts can get in the way of daily activities
- Organise a structured time to talk to someone you trust about your worries
- Try and limit this as you go, for example: to begin with you may organise to meet and talk about worries four times a day. Over this period, try and push worries to the back of your mind until you talk have your structured talking time. Put back the talking time for an extra five minutes, then ten minutes, then twenty etc. Soon you will only be having a chat once or twice a day, which in turn lessens the time talking and thinking about worries concerning the virus or it's repercussions
- By limiting the time you talk about the virus, you can try and concentrate on other activities whilst feeling secure in the knowledge your concerns will be addressed... just not immediately
- REMEMBER: To begin with, putting 'worry time' back can be really demanding. In this case, it is important to incorporate breathing techniques into your routine.

5] Breathing techniques are tedious, but not overrated:

- Although tedious to lots, breathing is absolutely not overrated as a coping mechanism for anxiety and stress
- Establish your 'go to' breathing pattern, mine is: breath in for seven-seconds, breath out for eleven
- Try and make your breath out longer than your breath in, and focus on your tummy while doing it
- Alongside this, it can be really helpful to go and sit down while you are breathing, and keep in mind how your feet feel on the ground
- By concentrating on the feeling of your feet on the ground, you may like to think about the image of a tree
- This can help to make you feel rooted and grounded

Your body cannot physically keep up the anxiety if you work hard on breathing techniques, as it counteracts 'panic breathing' and thus slows down heart rate to a normal BPM

6] Establish a safe place for you that you can think about or go. Order it and make it 'loved'

- Just as you have the boundaries around the house, make sure you have a place within your house/outside to feel especially safe
- Look after this place like you look after yourself. Keep it ordered and clean, and make sure you take time to visualise it so that it is available for you at all times

7] A final but important note:

- Many of these will seem hard to do and perhaps futile, however, if you keep working on them and including them into your routine, they may just help to improve your mental health
- It may be that one technique works better for you than others, or that none of these work at all, HOWEVER, it is important to know these are not the only strategies out there to help with your anxieties
- There are plenty of ways in which to improve your mental health, this has just come from my experience, but someone else may use another technique
- Whatever helps you, keep doing it and know that this will end
- This is such a good time to focus on yourself and what makes you happy, and there is so much support out there which is very accessible