

## What COVID-19 has Taught Experts

Source: [Mind Beacon](#)

Here's what COVID has taught Mind Beacon experts, and the coping strategies they've found most helpful.

### What has COVID-19 taught you?

*Dr. Khush Amaria:*

- **I'm lucky**

We talked about why gratitude matters to keep ourselves grounded at times, emotionally well and resilient. I reminded myself often that I was safe, the people closest to me in life were safe and that I didn't need to feel guilty about that – feeling guilty would not let me be helpful to others or help those who were suffering. I didn't ignore the suffering and challenges for those around me, but hoped my attitude for gratitude might help someone along the way.

- **Humour matters**

I think of the times that I said to someone else “it took a pandemic for my husband or my kids to do – then fill in the blanks” and then laughed out loud. If humour was an option, I tried to use it to help myself cope with how unbelievable everything going on in the world was.

- **I don't have to do it all, I don't have to do it perfectly, and small successes matter**

Rather than thinking about getting something big and really meaningful accomplished in my new schedule working from home with the kids around, I used the SMART goals idea – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based. For example, exercise at a gym was a big part of my pre-COVID life. Instead of thinking I could replicate that, I focused on a smart goal of trying to move every day – for about 30 minutes – sometimes that meant breaking a sweat and other times it did not. But it was relevant for me and helped with stress management.

- **I can tolerate uncertainty**

I'll admit I don't like not knowing. I like to plan. I like to know what to expect, and I like to have control when possible. COVID has taught me that I can get better at tolerating uncertainty. And I can model this for others who are having a harder time with it. I've had plenty of opportunities to practise tolerating uncertainty and even being proud of my newfound ability to do so!

*Dr. Meredith Landy:*

- That I was capable of learning to live in the moment.
- I could lower expectations of myself and it would turn out well.

*Dr. Jennifer Carey:*

- I can handle more than I thought I could ... but not without tears, pain, laughter and at least seven hours of sleep.

### **What did you discover was your most effective coping strategy?**

*Dr. Meredith Landy:*

Checking in with myself to make sure I am living a life that is consistent with my values.

*Dr. Jennifer Carey:*

For me, what has helped me tremendously is to stop comparing everything I am experiencing and doing now to how things were “before”.

In the first few weeks, my mind would almost inevitably think of how the current circumstances compared to before. That comparison inevitably led to me highlighting lack and loss, which didn't help anything. By taking the new circumstances on their own, I have been more able to appreciate certain aspects that were hidden by my earlier comparisons. That doesn't mean I don't ever still make comparisons to before, but I work hard not to dwell on those thoughts.

### **A time for reflection**

As we step into phase 2, it's a good time to reflect on what you've learned, and use those insights as you move forward. What has COVID taught you? Have you been surprised by what you've learned about yourself? What works for you to get through hard times? Jot it down, or start a discussion with friends.

### **What has COVID-19 has taught you?**

*Dr. Hemal Schroff, Ph. D.*

How important social interaction is to my effectiveness when it comes to doing my job. How important having a routine is even when there isn't need for one. How feelings of loneliness and being fed up can come and go in waves and are not static.

*Dr. Andrew Gentile, Ph. D.*

While at first I felt like I was thriving – maybe even doing better because of the ways it added flexibility to do self-care and in my roles as a psychologist – it gave me a strong sense of meaning and purpose to help people cope with such a tangible and universal challenge that we are all struggling with. Later on, as the novelty of the lifestyle wore off, the experience was much more humbling in that it was clear nobody, including mental health professionals like myself, are spared from the ways that lifestyle constraints imposed by COVID impact our basic wellbeing.

In particular, it has taught me more about what my vulnerability factors are. For example, I live alone, and am a recent transplant to the city. So, by a month or two into isolating, I became very aware just how essential human touch is to functioning normally. It's as if my

basic body chemistry changed, my stress response became hypersensitive, and at baseline it was a bit more uncomfortable to be in my own skin. I've always known this was important for me in particular, but it became clear just how pronounced this was in COVID times as things went on.

I've also realized just how important it is for me to have transition time between work and personal time. I learned that when working from home, and not having a physical transition from workspace to home, I needed extra time and often an activity like some kind of exercise. Without that, my body doesn't seem to receive the cues it needs to tell myself that it's ok to transition to "relaxation mode." I end up preoccupied with work thoughts during personal time much more often, and life starts to feel like one big blur of work emails.

*Dr. Maksuda Akter, Ph. D.*

I have also realized that, though we are physically isolated from others, we are really connected and not alone. In particular, COVID teaches us we are in this crisis together as a human family, and as part of the world, we are deeply interconnected.

*Dr. Leorra Newman, Ph. D.*

I've been surprised at how quickly I was able to adapt to working at home. On the other hand, I've become more aware of my need for solo reflection time, which used to be built in naturally on my way to and from work.

### **What did you discover was your most effective coping strategy?**

*Dr. Andrew Gentile, Ph. D.*

One of my favourites has been mindful breathing and a hot bath for moments I'm particularly stressed. However, I realized that the times that were more difficult were directly related to how well I was keeping up with the basic pillars of self-care: sleep, exercise and nutrition. For me, that means making sure I do some kind of exercise every day, making sure I leave time for healthy meal prep on the weekends (because I know I'm not going to want to at the end of a long work day), getting off the screens by 9:00-ish and other basic sleep hygiene. When I have trouble initiating these behaviours, I have to give myself permission to lower the bar, however much I need to not feel so overwhelmed that I skip these habits altogether, even if it means reducing my "workout" to a short walk.

*Dr. Leorra Newman, Ph. D.*

Exercise has definitely been my most effective coping strategy. Going for a socially distant run with a neighbour when I can, helps relieve my stress and improve my mood. A close second would be baking: I jumped on the sourdough bandwagon early on and have learned how to make bread. I'm always amazed by how good it smells and tastes! It's satisfying to do something so physical and concrete that can sustain my family.

*Dr. Maksuda Akter, Ph. D.*

I think the pandemic gives us opportunity to slow down. It is a great opportunity to figure out what sources of belief and comfort we have.

I have been trying to use the valuable time with my family engaging in pleasurable activities (e.g., enjoying movie nights, going out for exercise, preparing delicious or foods with my son). I celebrated our festival, anniversary and birthdays in some ways that are different than in usual times, so that it will be a memory for our entire lives.