

Normal life has been **disrupted**

Managing the disruption
caused by COVID-19

Lorrae Mynard

Occupational
Therapy AUSTRALIA



Normal life has been disrupted

COVID-19 is causing widespread disruption to daily life for people across the world. While supporting social distancing recommendations and movement restrictions to keep our communities safe from the virus, we also need to be mindful of how disruption can affect our mental health, fitness and occupational health.





What can we do?

Many people will be spending much more time in their home, so let's rethink how to adapt our daily lives by looking at:



Productivity



Self-care



Leisure



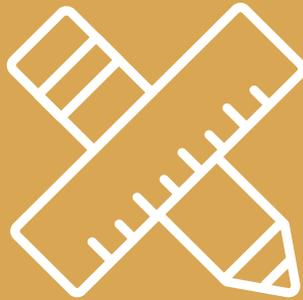
Your Space



Routines



Roles



Productivity

This includes everything you do for your paid or voluntary work, learning or studying, caring and anything that contributes to your family and community.

The current restrictions may affect people very differently depending upon what you usually do throughout your week.



Office Workers

For people who work in an office environment it may be relatively straightforward to undertake the same or similar work tasks from home. Some people may need to become familiar with online meeting platforms to keep the work going.



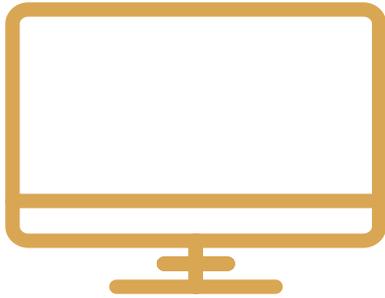
Customer Service

Those who are used to working in more direct customer service may be reassigned to completing desk-based tasks to support other aspects of the organisation's business.



Students

Students who usually attend classes at school and on campus may need to adjust to learning in an online format or with parental input.



Set up your workstation

If you are going to be doing a lot of work or study from home, it is important to aim for a well set-up workstation, as this may become your main place of work for the immediate future.

Look into whether you can access equipment such as a desk chair, desk of suitable height, keyboard, mouse and monitor if you are using a laptop.

There are lots existing resources and advice for working from home. Now is a good time to check them out.

Be deliberate about keeping in touch with colleagues, fellow students or peers. Phone, Skype or FaceTime to check in that people are doing OK.



Business As Usual?

Some people will continue going to their workplace, but the ways of doing things may change and/or the pace may become very pressured in responding to the COVID-19 situation (e.g. healthcare and emergency workers, government leaders, delivery workers).

It's super important to make sure you still eat, drink and take breaks to get through your shift and that you support colleagues by checking in with each other regularly.

Reach out if you need support dealing with new and difficult situations. Your contribution to the work will be reduced if you become physically or emotionally depleted.



Move into something new

For others who work in industries that provide direct customer service and are decreasing services, closing temporarily or permanently, this may be a very frightening time.

Depending on your skills, experience and location there may be an opportunity to move into a new role within industries that are taking on more staff to support their pandemic response, such as:

- healthcare
- cleaning
- delivering for online shopping
- government, biotechnology
- pharmaceutical companies
- web-based communications



If you can't find work

Not everyone will be able to readily find new employment. It will be important to seek early advice about entitlements and supports that may be available through Centrelink. If you're out of work, consider what else you can do to stay productive. While securing an income is essential, you may still be able to do things that give you a sense of achievement and satisfaction through making a contribution. This is really important for supporting mental health and wellbeing.

- Take an online course. There are many free and low-cost courses available through platforms like Coursera, FutureLearn and EdX,
- Get some spring cleaning or maintenance tasks done around the home or garden,
- Support others – provide childcare so that friends or family members who work in essential services can continue attending work in the event of school closures, or offer to shop or collect prescriptions for elderly family members or neighbours,



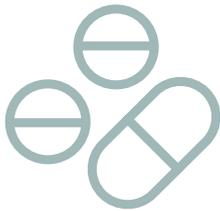
Self-Care

Looking after yourself and your space.



Personal Care

Most personal care tasks shouldn't be disrupted by the current situation, but do make sure to reach out for help if you don't have the things you need to support health and hygiene, like medicine and soap.



Health Support

Many people see health professionals as part of their regular self-care. Check with clinics you attend whether it is still possible to come in for appointments. Other clinics may be able to offer home visits or telehealth or online appointments.



Mental Health Support

Be aware of your own mental health in this distressing time. Reach out to your usual care providers, telephone or use online support services if you need mental health support .



Shopping & Food

Shopping for food and household essentials may radically change. Keep an eye on what is happening in your local area and consider whether it is still possible or advisable to shop in person. (It might be good to have an outing). If you were already using online shopping, adapting this task may be easy for you, if you weren't and you have internet access then now is the time to ask someone to show you how to make an online order.

Don't rely solely on takeaway or Uber Eats. Over a period this will be financially costly and a less healthy option. Aim to prepare balanced, nutritious meals. They don't need to be fancy. Pull out a recipe book or watch an online video to develop your skills in the kitchen.



Exercise

Exercise is very important for maintaining physical and mental health.

Be deliberate about including exercise in your day. Perhaps you could try a Zumba class on Youtube, download instructions for stretching or bodyweight exercises or dust off that exercise bike, trampoline or treadmill and hop on.

Get some incidental exercise when gardening, cleaning the windows or sweeping the driveway.

And if it's possible to leave your home, you could enjoy a change of scenery by taking the dog for a run, visiting a park or doing a walking tour of the neighbourhood.



Sleep

Sleep is also really important for your health!

When you don't have to be somewhere the next day it can be hard to get to bed on time and easy to sleep through your usual alarm.

Be disciplined, (which is also being kind to yourself) and keep regular bedtimes and waking times.

If you're having trouble getting to sleep, tune out of devices in the hour before bedtime. Try having a hot drink (not caffeinated), take a warm bath, listen to relaxing music, or do something that helps you to wind down.



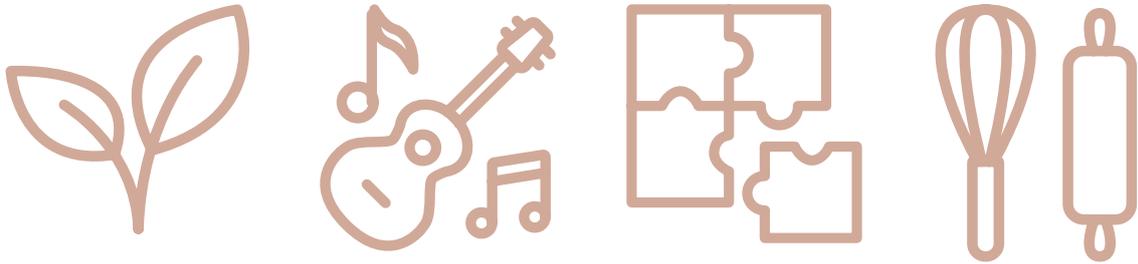
Leisure

It's really important to make sure we still pursue those things that can recharge us and bring pleasure. Don't fall into just bingeing on movies and TV series. Be deliberate about substituting activities that you would usually do.



Leisure ideas to try

- Listen to your favourite album, livestream a concert or watch a movie simultaneously with a friend and talk about it on the phone,
- Go to a virtual exhibition by looking through a coffee table book or browsing a gallery's online collection,
- Do some armchair travel by watching a documentary,
- Subscribe to a pay TV service to continue watching your team,
- Plan and stage your own household concert: share jokes, skits, magic tricks or musical performances,
- Jump online and learn how to use your local library's electronic resources. There's books, magazines, audiobooks, movies and more — all for free.
- Take a drive and admire the scenery, or visit somewhere you can enjoy some fresh air and a new view without mixing with other people .



Personal Projects

It looks like we'll all be spending a whole lot more time at home over the next few months so this could be the perfect time to start or complete a personal project.

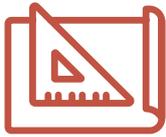
Do something you've long been putting off:

- Reimagine your garden layout
- Put together a photo album
- Master a new skill in the kitchen or workshop
- Organise cupboards, sheds, garage
- Learn to play a new piece on the piano or guitar
- Finish that quilting project



Setting up your space

Our lives occur in the context of an environment and making changes to our space or objects can support our engagement and comfort.



What can you source?

Consider whether there are any things you can bring into your environment to help you during this time of more restricted community movement e.g. source items like books, office or exercise equipment and materials to participate in hobbies or maintenance tasks.



Nourishing your senses

Sounds, taste, fragrance, visual surroundings - what makes you feel comfortable and engaged?

Put on music to lift your mood. Open a window for fresh air or to have some background noise. Or you may need earplugs to enable you to focus on work.

Listen to talkback radio to feel less isolated. Use herbal tea or essential oils. Put a bunch of flowers or a small branch of leaves in a vase to brighten your space.



Routines

Routines provide the pattern for our daily lives and generally support us in being able to do the things we need to do, when we need to do them. Having a predictable routine can give us a sense of stability.



Keep as much routine as you can

For many people, usual routines may be seriously disrupted by extreme social distancing measures and industry shut-downs.

It's really important to try to maintain as usual a routine as possible or to create a routine that can become the 'new normal' for you and your household during this period.

Try to maintain a similar daily routine, although the location of activities may change.

- If you're working from home, work during the same hours that you would in your usual workplace,
- If you have school aged children at home, try to maintain the same sort of pattern as the usual school day, doing school tasks during usual class times, taking meal and play breaks at their usual times,
- Get up and go to bed at your usual times.



Keep as much routine as you can

Consider ways to simulate your usual weekly activities to prevent becoming disconnected. Aim to do these at the same time they would normally occur in your week. e.g.

- Follow along with dancing videos when you can't go to dancing lessons,
- Shoot hoops and do drills in the driveway instead of basketball,
- Do a dog training session in the hallway instead of at obedience school.

If active transport is part of your usual routine still get out for that walk, run, skate, blade, scoot or cycle in your locality.

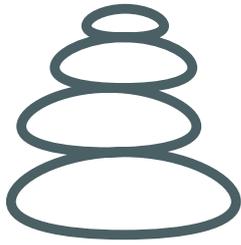


Write up a timetable

If you're working from home you might find it hard to put clear boundaries on 'home' tasks and 'work' tasks, so keeping a structured routine may help to clearly differentiate each to avoid distraction.

It will be important to negotiate between the adults in the home about how work-from-home needs and child care can be managed, being clear about who is available at any given time to respond to childrens' needs. Writing out a timetable might help.

It might sound crazy, but some adults and kids may feel more connected to their usual routines by wearing clothes or accessories that identify the activity you are focussed on – such as wearing a work lanyard or putting on school uniform.



Finding Balance

It's really important to aim for a balance of self-care, productivity and leisure occupations in your routine.

Think about balancing your routine in terms of the spaces and objects you use. Avoid spending all of your time using devices or sitting in one space. Variety is important. Try gentle stretching exercises during online lectures. Stand up during phone calls or sit on the couch when reading documents.

Manage the risk of feeling socially isolated by building social interactions into your day.

Be careful about how much time you spend consuming the news. Not only can this amp up anxiety, it might also be a distraction from other things you need to be doing.



Roles

Roles describe the things we do and how we relate to people around us. These include things like being a student, a worker, a club-member, a hobbyist, a parent, sibling, or friend.



What are your usual roles?

Think about the roles that you identify with and consider how you can maintain and even develop these during this time of social distancing and isolation.

What are your local community groups, clubs and churches doing to provide creative and online methods for meeting? Take advantage of these to maintain engagement in your usual networks and ask for help if you're not familiar with using online platforms.

Online tools can help you stay in touch with friends and family. Play a web-based boardgame with a friend or sibling or read a book to your grandchildren over Skype.

Try an old-fashioned way of relating to people – pick up the phone and have a long chat. Write a letter or card. Make something to post to someone.

This is a good opportunity to revive the role of being a neighbour. Check in with, and even get to know, the people who live nearest to you.



Look for hidden treasure...

We're all experiencing some level of life disruption. It's unpleasant and nobody would sign up for it voluntarily. But it's also possible that some unexpected good may emerge from the experience. Maybe the enforced slowing down or spending more time with family will be really beneficial. Let's look for hidden treasure. The COVID-19 situation means that we may all be living in geographically smaller circles for a while but that doesn't have to stop us living life to the full.



So what do Occupational Therapists do?

Occupational therapists (OTs) are health professionals who support health and wellbeing for people at all life stages. They have a broad understanding of the word 'occupation' – using it to describe everything that people need to do (like looking after themselves), want to do (like going to the movies) or are expected to do (like going to work or handing in assignments).

Illness, injury or developmental challenges can impact peoples' abilities to participate in occupation, so OTs work with people to explore whether making a change to the person, the occupation or the environment might enable occupational participation. Making a change to the person might involve learning new skills or ways of doing things. Making a change to the occupation might be involve doing the same occupation in a different way, or finding a substitute occupation, and changing the environment might involve bringing in new objects or rearranging objects within the space.

This is general information intended to support you in managing the present pandemic-related occupational disruption. Please contact a health professional for specific advice.

Consider any suggestions in line with the current government and health department recommendations and restrictions as these are updated regularly. It may be that something suggested becomes no longer possible.

This guide has been compiled by Lorrae Mynard. Lorrae is a Melbourne-based occupational therapist and PhD candidate with Monash University. She has worked in a variety of adult mental health settings in Australia, Canada and the UK.

This guide may be shared freely.



www.otaus.com.au

www.aboutoccupationaltherapy.com.au

© Lorrae Mynard, March 2020