

# THRIVING AS A FAMILY



DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

SPECIAL ADVICE FROM DR. JANNELL MACAULAY, LT COL USAF, RETIRED



As we adjust and attempt to move forward in an environment we did not choose for ourselves, **it is understandable** that we feel anxious, overwhelmed, and uncertain about the future.

**These feelings are normal**, for ourselves, and for our families, both at home and at work.

Under these circumstances it is best to **focus on what we can control**: our thoughts and our actions.

To help us control our actions we use self-care skills.

To help us control our thoughts we use psychological skills.

*"Amidst uncertainty, we become empowered when we stop trying to control the external environment, and we begin focusing on how to control the internal environment within our mind."*

- Dr. Jannell MacAulay



# Start a Mindfulness Practice

Aim for 10-12 minutes per day -- in one sitting or separated as Mindful Minutes throughout the day.

It may be helpful to practice mindfulness outside, on a walk or sitting outdoors in the fresh air. Encourage your family to join you.

Institute Mindful Minute exercises with your team or family. Maybe as a way to start your day, come together for meal times or family activities, or before zoom calls or meetings.

# Lead a Mindful Minute

**Gather** your family, your team, or just yourself.

**Say** "Let's have a Mindful Minute to focus our attention before we start our day. Ready? And...go..."

**Breathe** slowly for one minute. You can typically take 6-8 deep breaths in a minute, so just count your breaths instead of watching a clock.

- Eyes can be open or closed. Do what is most comfortable for each person.
- Resist the urge to look around.
- Focus your mind on your intent for doing this practice: increased focus, decreased distraction, and improved attention!

**Wrap** up as soon as you exhale your last breath and say "Alright...Let's begin!"

# Focus on Reframing

**Messaging matters.** Transitioning phrases like "new normal" to "**tactical pause.**" or seeing the current environment as an "**opportunity for growth and reflection**" versus "a threat to our overall well-being" can help you and your family build the ideal mindset for navigating these challenging circumstances.

Some questions to ask yourself and your family at the end of the day:

- **What did we do well together?**
- **Where can we improve?**
- **Did we laugh today?**
- **Did we love today?**

End your day with 3 deep breaths, a positive thought of gratitude, and a mantra that can help your family anchor together for the next day. Maybe it's "Be Here Now" or "**Together We Overcome**" or "Be Better Tomorrow."

# BE A MODEL FOR YOUR FAMILY

How can you model these behaviors for your family members? Now that work and home are completely integrated for many of us, how are you setting healthy boundaries for yourself and your family? Don't forget the importance of self-care practices!

## CONNECT WITH OTHERS

- Instead of saying "social distancing," consider yourself **physical distancing with social connections.**
- **Listen with compassion** to your family members. We all have feelings associated with the current environment, and we need to allow space for everyone's emotions.
- The **antidote to helplessness is helpfulness.** Engage in activities that let you give back.
- **Laugh.** Never underestimate the freedom and uplift that occurs when we laugh out loud with others.

## PUT ON YOUR OXYGEN MASK

- **Do you eat right?** Consider making mealtime a family affair. Encourage all family members to join in the planning and preparation.
- **Do you move right?** Get outdoors - together! Ensure you get your daily dose of #oxygen by grounding yourself within nature.
- **Do you sleep right?** Are you getting 7-9 hours of sleep every night? Are you setting good habits for others to follow?
- While difficult to get all three areas right every day, **what can you focus on today?**
- **Can you as a family commit** to one of these areas on a daily basis and hold each other accountable?



# FAMILY PRACTICE FOR HIGH STRESS MOMENTS

## STOP

Remind yourself to anchor in the present moment.

## BREATHE

Take 2-5 deep breaths. Ensure you are thinking rationally and clearly with a quiet mind.

## RE-FOCUS

From a relaxed mental state, shift to your ideal mindset. What is really important in this moment? Can I shift my mind to see the good, or the opportunity, within this challenge?