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Quarantine survival tips for extroverts and perfectionists — and those who live with them



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Many of the memes that started after the country began social distancing involved distraught extroverts and contented introverts. Consider the [Instagram image](#) of actress Zoë Kravitz eating and drinking in the bathtub with a caption that reads, “People: I’m going crazy in quarantine. Me: Living my *best* life.”

There’s truth to the jokes, but for some, it’s not a joking matter. People with certain psychological characteristics are more vulnerable than others to the effects of staying at home during the [coronavirus](#) pandemic. Also, what works best for one personality type might not be helpful to another. As a psychologist, I see the differences in how people adjust to the challenges of isolation, constricted life, uncertainty and dramatic change. Two personality traits that seem to have especially strong effects on people’s current functioning and household disagreements are extroversion, though introverts can also have issues, and perfectionism.

It’s important to remember that these traits exist on a continuum and that many people fall somewhere between two extremes. I will use the terms “extrovert,” “introvert” and “perfectionist” as shorthand to describe people who identify more closely with one side of a continuum.

How can you best cope, given your personality? And how do you reconcile the varieties of reactions and ways of coping among the people in your household? Psychological science and practice can provide guidance.

How extroverts (and introverts) can cope

Limited opportunities for in-person socializing, the absence of group gatherings and playing sports, and the decreased variety of activities all make social distancing especially difficult for extroverts. “I am an extrovert, and this isolation has been so hard on me,” said Jennifer McGinley, a communications professional from Hunt Valley, Md. McGinley, like other extroverts, is actively reaching out to others via text, video, phone and social media. Extroverts’ social networks, however transformed, can still protect their mental health. McGinley said that “everything becomes clearer and less anxiety-provoking when I virtually talk it out with my close friends and colleagues.”

Although spending time with others virtually may mitigate some of the negative effects of physical isolation, extroverts should try to go beyond online happy hours, Zoom group meetings and Netflix parties. Michael Wilmot, a research scientist at the Human Resources Research Organization, said that “being active, engaging in activities that are new and exciting, and experiencing positive emotions are also important for extroverts.”

So, if you’re an extrovert, stay active by walking, biking and hiking (if possible), as well as exercising indoors. Dancing to loud music might be especially well-suited for extroverts. And while adventures are on hold for now, you can still experiment with culinary, artistic and home-improvement explorations. Finally, make sure that you leave space to laugh and appreciate humor; watching comedies might be just what the doctor ordered.

Introverts, who draw energy from being alone and engaged in solitary pursuits, might indeed be adjusting better than extroverts to the current situation. But they shouldn’t be surprised if they discover that staying home poses difficulties for them, as well. “As an introvert, I am faring much better than some. I live alone and still have plenty to entertain myself: write, read, make art, garden, do home projects,” said Noreen Lace, a writer and university lecturer in the Northridge neighborhood of Los Angeles. But, she added, “I didn’t realize how much I used to count on minor interactions, like chatting with colleagues in a hall or talking with neighbors on walks.”

It is important to recognize that introverts also need to maintain relationships and social contacts to protect their emotional well-being. A sense of belonging and relatedness is a fundamental human need. A recent [study](#) showed that both extroverts and introverts felt better when they deliberately engaged in more extroverted behavior for a week.

Keep in mind, however, that scheduling several Zoom meetings one after another or trying to catch up with all family members in a weekend might overwhelm an introvert. Research suggests that too much stimulation of this kind can lead them to feel tired, unhappy and inauthentic.

How can you find a middle ground as an introvert? Pace yourself. Manage other’s expectations about the length of calls. Use this time as an opportunity to focus on your most meaningful relationships. “Having an excuse of this global crisis helps me say

no. I'm getting better with enforcing healthy boundaries," said Sophia Wax, a 25-year-old fitness coach from Salt Lake City, and a self-identified extreme introvert.

How perfectionists can cope

A study found that [perfectionism has been on the rise](#) in the United States, at least since the 1980s. Perfectionistic people have very high personal standards and become self-critical when they believe they have failed to reach them. They tend to base their self-worth on striving and achievement, ruminate about perceived past mistakes and worry about excelling in the future.

"The all-or-nothing approach puts them at a particularly high risk for psychological problems now, given that coronavirus and lockdown have severely restricted our lives and have forced us to compromise and improvise," said Gordon Flett, professor of psychology at York University in Toronto and a co-author of "[Perfectionism: A Relational Approach to Conceptualization, Assessment, and Treatment](#)."

If you or your family members are still seeking perfection and are having a hard time adapting to the new reality, you might be at risk for burnout. Rigidly adhering to pre-pandemic standards can lead to disappointment, anxiety and depression. "Obsessive information-seeking, which these days amounts to obsessively consuming news, just increases the burnout odds," Flett said.

[A psychologist's science-based tips for emotional resilience during the coronavirus crisis](#)

To increase your resilience, approach this time as an opportunity to strive for "good enough" in most of your activities. Practice modifying your pursuits or shifting your focus and effort from unattainable goals. As the coronavirus-related stalemate delays many work achievements or makes them impossible, this might be an opportunity to look beyond work as your primary measure of achievement and salute your accomplishments in other domains, such as family, partnership, self-care and spirituality.

Seth Gillihan, a clinical psychologist in Philadelphia and the author of "[Cognitive Behavior Therapy Made Simple](#)," suggests noticing all the "shoulds" we bring to our work and life. "What would happen if we let go of 'shoulds'? Maybe we could start to accept reality as it is and find self-compassion for ourselves," Gillihan said. We might even forgive ourselves for not achieving the Instagramable sourdough perfection or for "failing" to engage our kids in dozens of enriching activities perfectly suited for quarantine.

How differing personalities can cope

If you live with people who have different personalities from you, your needs might clash at times. The differences can become exaggerated during the pandemic because everybody is more stressed. "As an extrovert, I want to chat a lot about our current

crisis, but my husband is introverted and, after a shift in the hospital, prefers quiet,” McGinley said.

Forced togetherness can exacerbate tensions. “Since my extroverted roommate is now working from home, it’s been very hard to reconcile our preferences, like her love of loud music,” Wax said. The key is to talk openly about what you need, make a plan to compromise and check with each other frequently. How do you make a plan? “Bring awareness to how your day goes and identify frustration points — they are usually predictable. Then make a simple, doable plan for how you are going to deal with these situations,” Gillihan suggested.

[*\[Pandemic anxiety is making us sleepless, forgetful and angry. Here are tips for coping.\]*](#)

Wax realized that the only way to assert her needs was by speaking up. “You have to vocalize what you want — that’s how we agreed on a certain number of quiet hours per day, working separately, but coming together for dinner, which has been nice.” McGinley and her husband found a solution to their differing communication needs by settling on 10 minutes of “venting time” a day and giving each other space to be themselves. That space included her social time with close friends and colleagues throughout the day.

If you find yourself on the receiving end of a perfectionist’s judgment — [research](#) shows they tend to have unrelenting standards for others as well as themselves — resist the urge to question their standards. Instead, try expressing empathy and compassion for how tough it must be in the perfectionist’s shoes. After the perfectionism softens, you might try reaching a compromise on what is acceptable in different parts of your joint life.

And if you are the perfectionist struggling with one or more easygoing household members, try expressing what lies beneath your inflexible standards and tendency to keep raising the bar. Opening up about potential vulnerability or pain will go a long way toward fostering understanding and tolerance between you and others.

Although talking through your problems with trusted family members, romantic partners or friends is almost always beneficial, there is one important caveat. “When two people almost exclusively focus on problems and how bad things are, without problem-solving or pivoting toward anything positive, we call this co-rumination,” said Brandon Gibb, a professor of clinical psychology at Binghamton University.

While co-rumination can make you feel better in the moment, studies show that it is related to depression and anxiety in the long run. So, “pay attention to what you are talking about, and make sure to talk about what’s working for you,” Gibb said. And if your confidant sticks with negativity, bring that to their attention. If that doesn’t work,

make sure that you have other people in your network less prone to co-ruminate even during this difficult time.

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