



JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

10 TIPS FOR SHELTERING IN PLACE WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND

I began sheltering in place earlier than most because I tend to get pneumonia really easily. But by now most of us are being asked to do our part to flatten the curve. Whether you're still going to work (because you have to, or are still "allowed" to), or staying home (because you want to, or "have to"), below are tips based on what I've learned so far about staying sane in this unusual time. Would love to hear your tips as well!

1. Put on your own oxygen mask first.

It's a cliché, but it's true, and it's super relevant in these times. Please please please know it's not selfish to put your own mask on first – it's actually the only way you're going to be of greatest use to those around you. (Note, of course, don't be that person who thinks only about yourself; that's the very definition of selfish!) So what does that translate into in real life? It means taking a little bit of time each and every day to do something that makes you feel good. You could:

- Go for a walk/run and/or do other exercise
- Meditate/do yoga
- Write in your journal
- Read a book
- Take a nice long hot shower (or bath; I hate baths but I hear other people love them!)
- Binge your favorite show on Netflix
- Cook a favorite recipe
- Weed the garden
- Knit/sew/do needlepoint
- Do the New York Times crossword
- Beat your partner at the New York Times crossword :D

You choose. Point is, you know what you need to be doing in order to feel centered and safe. Yes, you may have to modify your normal pattern (say you have a gym membership; well, now you have to find ways to exercise in your house and around town, and basically alone) but figure it out. You need certain ritual experiences in order to feel like yourself. Only you can keep watch to ensure those things happen. Look after yourself people!!



2. Presume everyone has it, and act accordingly.

My friend Caroline Paul (a brilliant author, a former fire-fighter, and generally a badass woman) articulated this loud and clear to me the other day. I found it momentarily jarring, but then it felt extremely comforting, because instead of wondering who might have it and making exceptions here and there for family and close friends, if we just assume everyone has it and act accordingly that's how we'll keep all of us safe. "Acting accordingly" means:

- Not touching my hands to my face.
- Keeping a distance of 6 feet between me and everyone else. (And I do mean everyone. I'm trying not to give this to my partner, mother, and kids, and I'm trying not to get it from them too. We're getting really good at pantomiming hugs and high-fives! And boy, when the time comes, those first real hugs and kisses will be sweeeeeeeet.)
- Washing my hands with soap and water for 20 seconds pretty regularly throughout the day, and always after using the restroom (duh!), touching something others regularly touch (such as a doorknob or light switches) or in advance of preparing food.
- Wiping down deliveries, packages, and mail upon arrival.
- Doing a daily Clorox cleanse of commonly-touched things. (See details in tip 4 below...)
- If you're dealing with a quarantine...This would pertain to my 20-year-old son, who only just returned to us here in California a few days ago and brings with him a whole host of germs we haven't already been exposed to. We could have folded him into our "germ circle" and re-set our "Do I have the virus?" clocks. But given my underlying conditions, I am super interested in spending 14-straight-days vigilantly trying to protect myself so (hopefully) I can get to that point and have proof that I don't have it. So, my son is being quarantined in our house. He has his own bedroom and bathroom with a bright line of blue tape demarcating the line he and we must not cross, and we are serving him meals by placing them at his door and retreating so he can pick them

up. I could say he's being such a trouper, but the truth is he's a science wonk so he gets the how and why of this. Also, he truly loves nothing more than time alone with books. I think this could just turn out to be an oddly wonderful experience for him. And some of his newly-returned-from-college-friends came by and shouted up to his second-story bedroom (while staying 6 feet apart from one another). It was kind of a Hallmark moment! *Do you know anyone who is quarantined?*



3. Don't shirk your authority.

Kids should not be having play dates or sleepovers. That one kid who comes to your house brings their family's germs with them; since a person can have the virus for up to two weeks and not be symptomatic, a perfectly healthy looking kid can end up being the person who gives the virus to your whole family (or your kid can give it to some other family). This is just not okay, plain and simple.

Which is not to say it's easy to draw and hold the line. For days after our college-aged-18-year-old-daughter had arrived back home, Dan and I were somewhat wishy-washy about which COVID19 rules applied to her and her friends. Why? Well, we didn't want to further spoil her already dashed hopes for what this spring would be like. We wanted her to be happy. We wanted our house to feel happy. (And lord knows an unhappy kid makes for an unhappy house! Or does it???) A friend kicked me in the pants. "If you pay attention to the science Julie, it means NO SHE CAN'T BE WITH FRIENDS." I told him I was grateful for his unwavering clarity, and I meant it; the next day he texted me to say his older children had all arrived home and he was being faced with mutiny while trying to enforce the very rules he'd

shared with me.

Kids need rules and boundaries. Turns out that when we stopped hemming and hawing about what she could and couldn't do, and instead created a bright line rule, she got it. Yes, she was unhappy for awhile (particularly at first, when we were the parents with tighter rules than all others... that has changed) but even then, at least she had an answer. Once our local government issued a "shelter in place" order, one of the sticklers was whether she could go on a walk with friends as long as they kept their 6-foot distance from one another. (The government allows this, but we were a bit skeptical and she could tell.) She said, "Of course I want to keep you and others safe. It sounds like you don't trust that when I say I'll stay 6 feet away from others, I will!" She was in tears. We cried too. Told her we trusted her. She has since been on 6-feet-apart walks with friends, and even 6-feet-apart-from-a-friend-around-a-firepit. Yes I'd feel even safer if she never left the house. But she's 18. SHE NEEDS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE. I respect that. I am not breaking any rules nor allowing her to either. I am treating my daughter with respect and trust within the confines of the rules, and I know that in so doing I'm more likely to receive that back from her. Family life is feeling harmonious, mutually respectful, and good. And my daughter seems to feel proud that she's acting like an ADULT about all this. (Everything somehow comes full circle.)

I don't have school-age children, so I can only imagine what it's like to segue to online learning (or homeschooling) along with all the other things you want to see them up to. Some family friends of ours in Dallas have four girls, and the rule is that each day every child needs to spend some time on academics, chores, creativity, and exercise. This sounds like a great plan to me. ***What are you and your kids up to, and how are you coping?***

4. Keep your house clean.

I never knew how much fun I could have cleaning my house. For close to twenty years I've hired someone to come in and do so twice a month while I was busy being a full-time-work-outside-the-house person. We've cancelled that for the time being (but are still paying them, read tip 9 for why...). And instead, we're handling it in-house. Create a list of chores and let everyone decide which ones they're going to tackle. In our house, my daughter puts the dishes away each morning and sweeps the floor. My husband does most of the laundry. (My son is exempt for reasons you by now understand...) And on a daily basis, I don my gloves and take up my Clorox spray and cloth wipes and go room by room. I do the doorknobs, light switches, drawer pulls, cabinet knobs, appliance handles and knobs, backs and sides of chairs, surfaces of tables and countertops, sink fixtures, toilet flushers, doorknobs, laptop, phone, charger cords... (If you think I'm overlooking something DO TELL!) It usually takes me a full hour unless I add on a deep clean of a particular item. When I'm done my house smells like Clorox, and I inhale it with the satisfied feeling that I'm doing my part to keep my family free from germs. I also have little checklists around the house so I can mark off whether I did that part of the house on any particular day. It's giving me a significant amount of pleasure. Relief. Control. ***What's giving you a little relief?***



5. Seek social connection.

Humans are social creatures. Research shows that infants wither without it, and longevity is a direct result of the strength of our interpersonal relationships. Quite literally, we need each other in order to be well, particularly now when we're all struggling with some degree of anxiety, fear, frustration, and sadness over the impact this virus is having on our lives. So, while we're honoring the imperative to "Flatten the Curve" by staying home and avoiding physical contact with each other, we still need to find ways to connect. The phone is great for this. Better yet is a video calling service such as FaceTime or Zoom. Zoom or Google Hangouts are great for large numbers of people such as your family or extended family, or a friend group, or a work group. I've been holding virtual office hours on Zoom every other day or so just as a way to create space for people who need to talk, listen, and connect. If you're interested in joining, just follow me on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) and you'll see my posts for upcoming office hours.

6. But also give everyone their space.

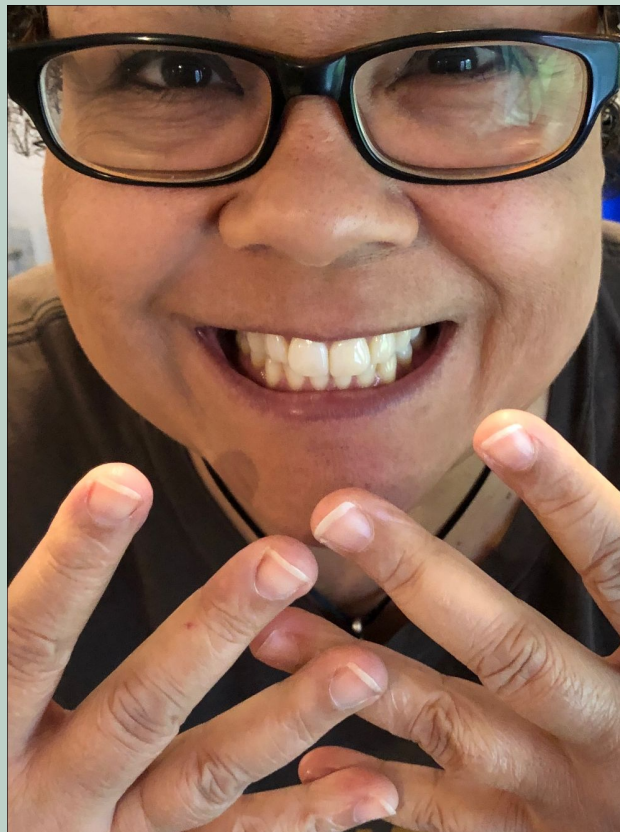
Unless you have a huge house, you're quickly going to get in each others' way and maybe at some point on each others' nerves. Parallel play works well in these times (picture toddlers playing near each other but not with each other) i.e. be in the same room but let everyone do their own thing. Come together for a meal, and clean that meal up together, and then let folks go their separate ways.

7. Set a goal you want to meet by the time we're allowed out again.

I came out of my roaring forties into my menopausal fifties, and the weight is piling on. Also, I'm warding off diabetes. And haven't been taking my relatively new asthma diagnosis very seriously. And to top it off I tend to avoid doctors... (I get that from my mom :D). But something about COVID19 affecting the lungs changed all that. So while watching this thing spread last month and starting to feel dread, I started using my inhalers. And while I do a vigorous 2 mile walk on my treadmill daily, guess what? I've lowered my mile time from 15 mins to 13.5 mins and I think lower numbers are in sight!!! I just might emerge from sheltering in place a wee bit healthier overall. ***What might you want to tackle while flattening the curve?***

8. Delight in small dividends.

I've always bitten my nails, and I'm particularly prone to doing so when on a deadline. But we're not supposed to be touching our hands to our faces, right, so guess what? No matter how stressed out I am, somehow my brain knows not to bite my nails!!! What??? Exactly. My nails are growing!!! ***Might some small dividends be coming your way?***



9. Support local businesses.

Our local businesses and non-profits are losing revenue. If there's an independent coffee shop you always frequent, an aesthetician who grooms your face regularly, a cleaning service you depend on, a dog walker who has seen your pooch daily for years... cancel that for now, but if you have the means, pay them anyway. They don't have "paid sick leave" or a "work from home" option, so no work means no income, and they may be closer to paycheck-to-paycheck than you may think. (And I'm inherently speaking to the privileged by writing this... you may

be thinking Hey Lady you're talking about ME here and if that's true, please know that I know I'm coming from a place of privilege and I'm trying to advocate for YOU.)

10. Serve those in need.

Our most vulnerable populations are even needier during this crisis. Your town's Meals on Wheels or food pantry might need volunteers. (Packages can be wiped down and placed out for people to come and collect.) Your elderly neighbors will appreciate your checking in on them. (Ring the bell, then back up; keep your distance, but show your love and care). Serving others is good for them and it'll make you feel good about yourself too. I'm in this with you and together we'll get through it!

xo,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "JULIE". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke that extends to the right and then loops back down to form the letter. The letters "U", "L", "I", and "E" are smaller and more straightforward.