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Its newsletter time again at Upper Island Counselling. This fall, as our team put our heads together around what topic we wanted to write about, we were all in agreement that priority is to help set you up for success with our first, ever, COVID winter.

COVID took hold in Canada in the middle of March, and we all went home. If you recall, we then had one of the sunniest and loveliest April's we'd had in a long time. We walked, hiked, rode bikes, went to the park, and played outside with the kids through April, May, June. Then by July we were able to add in the ocean, the lake, the river, and the potholes – safely. We sat out on the patio and soaked up the sun. We invited our people to join us in the back yard to connect – with fresh air and safe distance all around us. We hit the road and went exploring our beautiful island. We went camping. We felt freedom and joy amidst the stress and anxiety of the pandemic.

Then September arrived – as it always does. But differently. School is different and teetering at times like an unstable house of cards. Most parents are holding their breath – tiptoeing around it – hoping and even praying that it doesn't fall. The shift in seasons doesn't feel as cozy as fall sometimes does, as there is heightened worry this year around colds and flus, school closures, business and financial impacts, isolation and loneliness.

We believe that while all this is true, with a little extra attention and planning – we can all create a resilient self-care plan for the next 6 months to help nurture and protect our mental health and wellbeing. We hope that after reading this newsletter you get out a paper and pen and start to create a plan that is most suited to you. You got this.



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10 Awesome Exercises to do At Home

- At Home (or even Outdoor!) Yoga
- Play a Game (with a lot of movement!)
- Stream an At Home Workout Class
- 20 Minute Core Workout
- Go on a Run
- HIIT Training Exercise
- Day Hike (when the sun is out!)
- Learn TikTok Dances
- Take a Bike Ride
- Push-ups and Crunches (set a goal)
- Make Up Your Own Workout!

<https://ruhlsoftheroad.com/at-home-workout/>

Preparing for a COVID winter, with our mental health in mind

The approach of winter is a difficult time for many of us. The summer holidays are officially over, days are getting shorter, the air is getting colder, and there are fewer days where outdoor activities are easily enjoyed. And of course, as I'm sure none of us have forgotten, this year presents the additional challenge of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

So, how do we keep well both mentally and physically healthy during what is likely to be one of the more challenging winters we've faced as a community?

First, acknowledge the challenges and validate your feelings

This may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about how to prepare for a Covid-winter, but we believe it's one of the most important. Acknowledge that these are uncertain times. Globally, people are experiencing anxiety, stress, and a range of other emotions related to the ongoing pandemic. It's ok if you are too. (It's hard to not be impacted emotionally on some level).

Allow yourself to feel without judging yourself for feeling. Provide yourself with some space to feel – whether that be by spending some time alone to simply experience how you feel, journaling a few minutes each day, practicing mindfulness, or crying when it feels necessary. Reach out to talk with an understanding, supportive person in your life.

If you're finding it difficult to acknowledge and validate your feelings – seek the support of a counsellor, we can help with this.

Then, get active

Regular exercise is a key component of healthy living as it supports cardiovascular health, is a protective factor against many diseases and also boosts your immune system naturally.

Yes, getting regular exercise will be increasingly challenging as the days grow shorter and many indoor activities are currently unavailable due to Covid. It might take a little extra creativity this year to transition your activities from summer to winter. Let's try some brainstorming. Is your local gym/studio offering online or outdoor classes? Does the local pool provide private swim times? Is there a local trail system you've been hoping to explore that's safe to do with headlamps after dark? This might be a great year to pick-up an activity like snowshoeing or skiing, which allows for physically distanced, active-outdoor time. What other ideas do you and your friends have?

Remember to eat well

Nutrition and hydration play a major role in our mental and physical well-being. And, with the shift in seasons and the rise in colds and flus, it's a good time to start thinking about what you put into your body to maximize your health and immune system.

Looking for some ideas for immune-boosting recipes? Check out the links below:

<http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/18047/lifestyle-diets/healthy-immunity/>

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/immune-friendly-recipes>

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Online Resources



For additional resources:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/mental-well-being-during-covid-19>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome>

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/mental-health-covid-19>

<https://www.gleneagles.com.sg/healthplus/article/easy-home-exercises#content>

Preparing for a COVID winter, with our mental health in mind (cont'd)

And finally, connect socially

Again, this may be another tough transition as we've been fortunate to have months of good weather during the pandemic, allowing us to maintain physical distance while still visiting with friends and family outdoors. There's always talking on Zoom, FaceTime, etc., but we understand that these can feel less satisfying.

So, creativity is required again when it comes to connecting while still maintaining our small bubbles. Here are a few good ideas: write letters (old school, we know), start a distance-book club (meet online or over the phone), play online games or games via Zoom with friends, write sidewalk notes in chalk to neighbours. What other creative ways of connecting have you heard about recently? Could you invite your family or friend group to engage in some brainstorming on this topic to help set your crew up for maintaining Covid winter connection?

We understand that this winter going to feel different from what we are used to. And we hope that some of the ideas above will support your transition from the warmer to cooler seasons. If you find yourself feeling hesitant about trying to be creative around social connection, eating well, and keeping active – check back in with our first note about acknowledging and validating feelings. It's an important one to come back to regularly. Good luck! With some preparation and a plan in place you can stay healthy and resilient this winter.



Winter Preparation for Couples

With the changing of the seasons toward wetter, colder weather and shorter periods of daylight, most of us tend to spend more time indoors than we did during summer. Add to this the various health and social recommendations linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is a high likelihood that this autumn and winter will find us spending more time at home than we have in previous years.

Although there can be many pleasant aspects to hunkering down in our homes during the blustery days of autumn and winter, extended periods spent inside can also present challenges – especially for couples who are not used to spending so much time together. It is common, even in the strongest relationships, for long periods of togetherness to lead to some degree of stress and irritation. Those little quirks about our partner that we're usually able to shrug off – maybe even laugh about – can suddenly feel like intolerable issues that drive us up the wall. Likewise, disagreements that we're normally able to work through in a calm and constructive manner may become pressurized during extended periods indoors, and turn into heated, and even hurtful, arguments.

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Winter Preparation for Couples (cont'd)

As such, it can be a good idea for couples to anticipate the possibility of challenges ahead and do a little work in preparation. Just like the squirrel who builds up her stockpile of acorns to get through the lean months of winter, so too can couples build up the tools in their relationship toolkit to help their relationship stay strong and healthy during the cold months. Below are a few ideas, strategies and resources to help couples with this task:

1) Communication is Key Being able to talk through important and contentious issues constructively and respectfully is an essential part of keeping a relationship strong. Effective communication can be understood as a skill that requires learning and practice (see #5 below for some suggested resources). As a starting place, a few of the basic components of effective communication include:

- Take turns talking and listening (instead of fighting to get your point across);
- Use empathy and reflection to show you understand your partner's perspective;
- Speak from your own perspective (sometimes called using "I statements");
- Avoid judgment and contemptuous remarks, even if you disagree;
- Work toward a solution, versus trying to "win" the argument.

2) Be a Team It has been said that healthy, intimate relationships contain three important parts: a romance, a friendship and a partnership. The partnership refers to cooperating to manage the various chores and duties of daily life. This includes household chores, parenting, managing finances, etc. Treating your relationship as a cooperative team and doing your best to balance the sharing of the various duties in your lives can help both partners feel supported and avoid resentment and burn-out.

3) Quality-time Together Set time aside to be together, just the two of you. This time can be spent doing an enjoyable activity like playing a game or eating a meal, or it can simply be time together in each other's company. Regardless of how the time is spent, use it to connect with each other and strengthen your romance and friendship. This is *not* the time to talk about work, finances, home repairs and the kids. Be curious and learn about each other. You may be surprised how much there still is to know. To help with this activity, do an Internet search for "Date Night Questions" and see what you find.

4) Quality-time Apart "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" says the age-old adage, and there is certainly wisdom that can be found in this idea. In addition to giving attention to your relationship, it is also important for you to give attention to you. It is important to take time to foster your own independent self-care be it through exercise, friendships, hobbies, or whatever works best for you. By doing so, you will likely find that you feel more energized when you return to your relationship and more passionate about continuing to build and maintain intimacy with your partner.

5) Read Relationship Books Together This activity can do double-duty: it can offer quality-time spent together, and it can also provide you and your partner both with common language and strategies for strengthening your relationship. Here are a few titles to consider:

- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman & Nan Silver
- *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* by Gary Chapman
- *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples* by Harville Hendrix.

In conclusion, the winter can present unique challenges to relationships – which are further heightened this year by the pandemic. However, by anticipating and preparing for challenges by putting effective strategies in place it is possible for a relationship to come through winter and into spring stronger than ever.

