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Here's how you can stay sane during isolation...

The COVID pandemic has had a particularly stressful impact on mums. Despite the lockdown, there are no days off with the kids constantly at home and chores piling up endlessly. You are overworked and frustrated as you find yourself donning multiple hats throughout the day—that of a mum, a teacher, a chef and a caregiver, in addition to working from home. All this, while dealing with looming pay cuts and job loss. Under such circumstances, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed.

"I love my kids but honestly, I am losing my mind! They too can't stand being jailed at home anymore, and there's only so much I can do to keep them entertained. My husband and I are both working from home, and it is getting really hard to juggle work, chores and giving the kids enough time. I always thought work from home was a luxury and this lockdown has made me realise that it is anything but that!" says Franseca Monteiro, marketing professional, mum to Ella, six and Ethan, three.

Hang in there mums, there's light at the end of every tunnel! Being confined to the four walls of your home, with little or no interaction even with your next door neighbor, let alone others in the building or locality, can make you feel like you're struggling to hold on to that last shred of sanity. Here are the few things you can do to ensure you avoid the risk of a total burnout

KNOW THAT YOU'RE DOING OKAY

It's impossible to do it all, so you must know that you are doing the best you can. These are unprecedented times we're living in and you're not expected to be perfect. It is important to reassure yourself of this from time to time. Make a note of the little accomplishments you've made – it could be that you've successfully scratched off everything on your to-do list, or you've managed turn out a new recipe flawlessly—celebrating the little things goes a long way in keeping a positive, happy vibe going for you.

PLAN, PLAN AND PLAN

Easier said than done, especially when a lot of us are struggling to have a fully productive day no matter how much you try to carefully structure out your day. However, efforts must be made to achieve a certain amount of order in the chaos. It's important to develop a routine that helps you devote adequate time to the kids, your work and your household chores, and also ensure that the kids get enough playtime—all cemented by the art of striking a balance. "Children are creatures of habit, and they love schedules. Start by sitting down with children and making a time table for the day that contains a mix of different activities. The Multiple Intelligence theory dictates that the schedule for the day must be a balance of fun, learning, relaxation, screen time, family time, unstructured play and physical exercise. So, try to include activities of different kinds in moderation. With all the different activities lined up for the day, it gives you and your li'l ones something to look forward to," says Dr Pallavi Rao Chaturvedi, vice president, Early Childhood Association, founder, Brainy Bear Pre-Schools, and parenting coach.

HAVE SOME FUN!

Activity time with the kids can be a stress-buster for you too. It doesn't necessarily have to be scheduled for weekends only, this can be a great mid-week pick-me-up for overwhelmed and overworked mums. "Get down to your kids' level, sit with them on the floor, participate in their games and let yourself sink in with their little creative thoughts. It's important to be involved in their efforts, be it art, pretend play or constructive games," says Dr Rajesh Kumar, consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist. You could also make it a family bonanza by involving extended family too. "Once a week, we have a video call with my siblings and their families and seeing my kids that excited to see their cousins and relatives is heartwarming. We play housie, pictionary, etc where the kids get involved too, and it is an instant mood-lifter for the whole family, especially with all the anxiety surrounding the situation," Francesca explains.

UNDERSTAND YOUR TOT

If you find your kids cranky, moody, restless or uncooperative, it's hard not to have your head explode, especially when you're dealing with adjusting to this new 'normal'. Take a deep breath, and try to gauge his emotions. Being indoors is just as frustrating for them as it is for you. It helps a great deal to calmly think about how you would want to deal with their moods, so as to not lose control of your own. Does your child feel like you're not giving him enough attention? Or do you have a bigger problem at hand? Understand the situation before figuring out a course of action. "Mums need to understand that a time like this is emotionally disturbing to the kids, especially due to the absence of outdoor activities. Acknowledge your child's problems closely and try to talk to them about it. As them if there is a particular activity they'd like to do. Effective communication is the key. Remind yourself that your child is dependent on your care and love. Physical comfort is a powerful way to manage stressed events. A child needs to feel loved, safe and supported," says Dr Kumar.

TAKE A BREAK

Make time for yourself and get lost in your own thoughts. "Observe when you need to take a step back, as it is overwhelming to be a parent every minute. Allow yourself to take some "me" time and hand over the parenting responsibility to your spouse, if possible," advises Dr Kumar. Even without household help around, it is possible to get by with a simple divide and conquer rule. Allocate chores in such a way that all family members, including you, have enough breaks throughout the week. Keep your spouse and other family members informed about your mental and emotional needs.

Let your workplace know if you need a day or two off from work to just unwind. Request your spouse to look after the household for the day, or even if you just need a few hours to catch up on a TV show or a movie. You could also give yourself a spa day at home—relax in your hot tub, put on a hair remedy, slap on that face mask or paint your tippy toes. You'll be amazed when you realise just how much you needed that time to reboot and unwind.

BRIGHTER DAYS AWAIT

It may not seem like it, but there's hope for all of us, mums. Eventually things are going to relatively go back to the way they used to be and you will breathe a sigh of relief. If your work schedule is hectic, it's best not to react to the small mistakes at home, as it may cause mental distress. "Avoid conversing with anyone for a few minutes, or shift your focus to something else. This will quell any chances of using harsh words in the heat of the moment. While grappling with tensed situations at home, take some time out from each other to reassess the situation. A brief apology and a gentle shift to newer activities are always helpful," says Dr Kumar. It is tough to contain your own meltdowns. But it's okay to feel low as long as it is not harming those around you.

Here are a few small ways to help you keep your sanity in order

Eat right: A balanced diet and intake of Vitamin C can help to boost your immune system.

Stay socially connected: Stay connected with your parents, friends, family and colleagues. Even when you're socially distancing, it is possible to receive comfort and support from your loved ones.

Spiritual practices: It helps you to not only calm your mind but also to connect with your inner self. It is a boon in such a crisis.

Exercise and yoga: Regular indoor exercise and yoga can help maintain your fitness. A fitness regime also promotes a proper sleep cycle and gives you a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Writing a journal: Keeping a daily journal would help improve your mental health and give you room to vent your feelings.

Gratitude exercises: It has been proven that gratitude improves your physical and psychological health. Grateful people are happier and it enhances empathy and improves your sleep, self-esteem and mental strength. **MB**

