



# FLASHES GUIDE

QUICK TIPS FOR LIVING SMARTER FROM  
TRUSTED KENT STATE SOURCES

**Y**ou may recall those days when you were getting ready to head to work or run errands and you thought to yourself, *I wish I could just stay home today*. How times have changed. Thanks to COVID-19 restrictions, most of us are spending a lot more time at home and keeping our social circles small in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus and not overwhelm the healthcare system.

Back in March, when many of us were suddenly thrust into new ways of living and working, little did we realize that staying at home, working remotely and limiting our social interactions would present so many new challenges.

Beginning with those first few weeks—and continuing over these many months—Kent State experts have created resource guides for the university's website, written insightful articles, shared research findings, and given advice on webinars, video conferences, podcasts and more.

We've compiled and condensed some of their wise words to help us cope with challenges we face today. The following topics contain tools and strategies to put into practice.



## RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF STRESS IN CHILDREN

Children feel the same stresses as adults; however, when they are anxious and stressed it often is displayed differently. Here are some signs to be aware of:

- **BEHAVIOR REGRESSION:** Children may display behaviors you thought they had outgrown. Look for unusual behaviors, such as needing a special toy for comfort, bed-wetting or baby talk.
- **CHANGES IN EATING AND SLEEPING:** Children will show either a sharp increase or decrease in appetite. Your child may experience difficulties falling asleep, sleeping longer than usual or nightmares.
- **ACTING OUT:** Your child may start pushing boundaries, displaying aggression, not following directions or arguing with family members.

Consult your child's healthcare provider to determine the best steps for addressing these behaviors.

—School of Psychology program, College of Education, Health and Human Services



## KEEPING YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN ACTIVE

Boost your child's literacy and cognitive development with these easy, fun tips. Children and adults can enjoy these activities together while sharing experiences and making memories.

- **READ:** Read anything from cereal boxes, candy wrappers, comic strips, maps and, of course, books! Play word games like Boggle or Scrabble.
- **TALK:** Ask questions, ask for more information, ask for an opinion, discuss ideas, put on puppet shows, tell stories, sing or tell jokes.
- **WRITE:** Write stories, poems, lists and letters. Draw, paint and chalk with at-home art supplies. Observe and record the world around you.

—School of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies; College of Education, Health and Human Services



## DEVELOPING EMPATHY

If there ever was a time to start practicing empathy, now is the time. Tension from an arduous election and an ongoing global pandemic has certainly not cultivated empathy in our communities. While we know what empathy means, understanding it and practicing it are not one and the same.

Clare Stacey, PhD, associate professor of sociology, College of Arts and Sciences, has explored why empathy is easy to understand, yet difficult to practice. The reality is, empathy does not always lead to connection with others—empathy can reinforce solidarity with those who are most like us, often at the expense of those who are outside of our social milieu. Studies have shown that the more empathic a person is, the more politically partisan they are.

Despite known drawbacks, empathy is an emotion state that has the potential to benefit the giver as much as the recipient. Here are some tools to help us learn to imagine what it is like to be someone different from ourselves.

**TREAT EMPATHY AS A LEARNED SKILL.** The good news is, empathy is not an innate trait or a moral disposition, but a skill that can be cultivated. Simply believing empathy is a skill rather than a fixed trait increases the likelihood that people will work harder to empathize. We can seek out tools to engage in perspective taking, arguably the core component of empathic engagement.

An ‘empathy wall’ is when we’ve reached a point where we simply cannot understand another’s perspective. When this happens, people tend to distance themselves from their adversaries, thus deepening the divide. We can break through this wall by observing our own behavior, abandoning assumptions, practicing deep listening and asking questions to understand the other person’s actions and beliefs.

### APPLY SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION.

At its core, the concept of the sociological imagination asks us to imagine the circumstances of an individual’s behavior in the context of societal structures and realities. This means to not only consider someone’s background and how that could affect their opinions, but also what’s going on in their community, the country or the world.

As a tool, the sociological imagination allows us to more readily appreciate the reality of another person, a key step in the cultivation of empathy. It manifests as a willingness to ask questions about why someone acts or believes as they do and to then seek out reliable information to answer those questions—information that can be gleaned from educators, journalists or even from those in question.

It takes work and commitment and a willingness to hold judgment in abeyance as we seek greater understanding of the context that informs a person’s life. Knowing their story will help us learn where they’re coming from, even if we don’t agree with them.

If we really want to practice empathy, not merely tout its virtues, we must embrace tools like those above. Only then can we transcend the insidious empathy walls that separate our communities.

—Clare L. Stacey, PhD, associate professor of sociology and co-director of the Healthy Communities Research Initiative. Adapted from a guest post, “Empathy is hard. What we need is (sociological) imagination,” on *Contexts: Sociology for the Public* blog by the American Sociological Association, Oct. 20, 2020. See article at <https://contexts.org/blog/empathy-is-hard-sociological-imagination/>.

## MANAGING UNCERTAINTY AND DISAPPOINTMENT

In the wake of COVID-19, many of us are facing uncertainty and disappointment. The good news is that there are research-supported best practices for managing uncertainty (expectations in general) and disappointment (when expectations are not met). To tackle both issues, here’s a simple, four-point checklist.

**1. REVISE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.** The first thing to ask yourself when facing uncertainty or disappointment is: What am I expecting/what did I expect?

The fact is, you need to be ready for a variety of potential outcomes. To revise your expectations:

- **Think back on history.** What are some examples that apply to the current situation? What led to one situation going differently from another?

- **Set up reasonable expectations.** When facing a new situation, be prepared for the good, the bad and the neutral. When imagining a “bad” outcome, focus on realistic consequences—not some end-of-the-world scenario—and how you could move forward in that situation.



**2. INCREASE YOUR TOLERANCE.** In the context of COVID-19-induced isolation, a lot of people feel like their “energy to deal with stuff” cup is running on empty. We need to learn how to refill that cup and how to make it bigger—so it takes longer to drain.

To increase your tolerance:

- **Practice mindfulness meditation.** Try the Koru Meditation classes offered by KSU or any meditation app.
- **Sleep regularly** and long enough.
- **Drink enough water** and eat regular, healthy meals.
- **Don’t immediately distract yourself** when you experience a negative emotion. Take at least 5 minutes to process what happened and how you’re feeling before running away from it.

**3. REEVALUATE PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR.** Don’t miss the learning opportunities that negative situations offer. You can still be upset—but after you’ve felt those feelings, come back to the situation. Reframe and reevaluate what to do now. You’ll feel better with a reasonable, specific plan of action.

Don’t set nebulous goals like “get better at drawing”—instead, plan to practice sketching for 10 minutes a day after you eat dinner. To practice reevaluating perceptions and behavior:

- **Think back on disappointments** you’ve experienced that panned out okay. Practice reframing your perceptions and make a retroactive (or current) plan of action for how you could improve.
- **Talk through these experiences** with your friends, following the above steps.
- **Come back** to disappointing/uncertain situations after taking a break (see below).

**4. TAKE A BREAK.** Sometimes you just need to step away from a situation to clear your head. Make sure you come back to the situation—leaving it unattended to will only make it worse in the end—but it’s okay to refill your cup and try again later. While you probably know your favorite way to take a break, here are a few recommendations:

- Take a hot shower.
- Chat with a friend/loved one.
- Go for a walk (outside if you can).
- Try some simple stretches.
- Drink some water and take a nap.

Try enacting just one of these strategies today—your future self will thank you for it!

—Kent State of Wellness Ambassadors: Samantha Nousak, MA ’20, doctoral candidate in sociology, and Muhammad Hassan Bin Afzal, doctoral candidate in political science.



## COPING WITH STRESS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Mental health can be directly impacted in times of uncertainty and social isolation. These tips may help ease these feelings:

- **EXERCISE:** Finding time to work in 30 minutes of exercise three-to-five times a week can improve mood, confidence and keep your mind occupied.

- **SOOTHING BEHAVIORS:** Rubbing the palms of your hands is a low intensity stimulation that activates the sensory neurons in the hands and releases oxytocin (a “feel-good” hormone).

- **MINDFULNESS:** Taking a moment to recognize your breath and body during meditation can improve how you are feeling. Numerous smartphone apps help facilitate this exercise.

— Counselor Education and Supervision program, College of Education, Health and Human Services





## EATING HEALTHY ON A TIGHT BUDGET

Even though home-cooked meals are the best option to stay on budget, the amount of money you spend in grocery stores can add up. Here are some tips to eat healthy on a tight budget:

- **SHOP SMART:** Create meal plans and grocery lists ahead of time and be sure to eat before you head to the grocery store, as shopping when hungry can increase unnecessary food purchases. Be sure to watch for coupons and discounts to reduce your grocery bills.
- **PICK LESS EXPENSIVE PROTEINS:** Try less expensive cuts of meats such as chicken thighs. Cut up, portion into several

containers and freeze. Thawing and refreezing reduces meat quality. Keep shelf-stable proteins on hand like canned beans, tuna and nuts.

- **STOCK UP ON CANNED AND FROZEN FOODS:** Frozen fruits and vegetables can last for months or years. Canned goods can be stored without being refrigerated. Be sure to drain excess water and wash off produce to reduce sugar and salt content.

—Nutrition and Dietetics program, College of Education, Health and Human Services



## COOKING WITH KIDS

Getting kids to eat something other than their preferred foods (like chicken tenders and mac and cheese) may be difficult, but getting them involved in the planning and cooking process helps open their minds to try something new.

Here are some ideas to implement at home:

- **GET THEM INTERESTED:** Have children read recipes with you and help create shopping lists. Explore new cultures by selecting recipes from around the globe.
- **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Teach them the importance of hand washing and cleaning as you go, so foods are not cross-contaminated. Clarify the dangers of raw ingredients and explain how to safely use a knife (start with plastic). Be sure to talk about the dangers of hot surfaces and how to properly use appliances.
- **GET THEM INVOLVED:** Children can help with mixing, kneading and other hands-on tasks. They can also help add ingredients as you are cooking. Use the time to talk about what is happening to the ingredients when you apply heat.

— Chef Anthony Hamilton and Chef Andrew Eith, Hospitality Management program, College of Education, Health and Human Services



## PRACTICING GRATITUDE

It is that time of year when many of us begin to focus on what we are thankful for. This year, things might look different, but it is important to find even small things to be extra grateful for. According to *Psychology Today*, being grateful can improve one's physical and mental health, increase empathy, reduce aggression, improve sleep and bolster self-esteem.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- **KEEP TRACK OF WHAT YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR.** Write what you are grateful for on a slip of paper and place it in a gratitude jar to take out and reflect on later. Or start a gratitude journal where you write what you are thankful for in a notebook.
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Sometimes the small things in our lives are the best things. So when practicing gratitude, it is okay to remember and reflect on the little things.
- **BE KIND TO YOURSELF.** In the beginning, you may struggle to come up with things you appreciate in your life. You may also have a bad day where it seems impossible to express gratitude. In these moments, remember to be kind to yourself.



- **CONSIDER A GRATITUDE BUDDY.** Engage in a gratitude activity, such as the jar or journal, with someone you are close with—maybe a close friend, significant other, or roommates.
- **GIVE BACK.** This may not be as possible as it once was, but if the opportunity arises and you are able, consider giving back to others or volunteering as a way to express your gratitude.

—Bethanie Mauerman, BA '15 (psychology and sociology), MEd '18 (clinical mental health counseling), licensed professional counselor and doctoral candidate in health education and promotion

## MAINTAINING AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

While many people struggled to maintain an active lifestyle prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, now even more factors contribute to a sedentary lifestyle: work and school have transitioned online causing increased screen time, fitness facilities and parks have closed or reduced their operating hours, and social interaction is limited due to physical distancing guidelines.

A group of Kent State University professors, Jacob Barkley, PhD, Andrew Lepp, PhD, and Ellen Glickman, PhD, from the College of Education, Health and Human Services, joined with current and former Kent State doctoral students (now at other universities) to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on physical activity and sedentary behavior. They published their findings in the *International Journal of Exercise Science*.

In a before-and-after pandemic comparison of more than 400 university students and employees, they found that those who were most active prior to the onset of COVID-19 were the most negatively affected. Those who were not highly active before the pandemic were able to increase their physical activity, perhaps because of time saved by eliminating the daily commute. But all participants in the study reported a significant increase in daily sitting, which is associated with a variety of negative health outcomes—and even a greater risk of dying earlier.

With coronavirus cases on the rise, we can expect current social distancing measures and limited access to recreational facilities to continue. Here are three ways to maintain positive health behaviors and stay active through the winter months and beyond:



**1. MINIMIZE SITTING FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.** Many people are still working from home and spending an inordinate number of hours sitting in front of their computer each day. Minimize the amount of time spent sitting by investing in a standing desk or taking breaks to stand, stretch and move around throughout the day.

**2. EXERCISE OUTSIDE OR AT HOME.** If you can't make it to the gym, or don't want to, there are other ways to exercise at home. Outdoor activities like biking and hiking or an online workout class are great ways to get moving. Even light activity, like a walk, can help reduce stress and get your blood flowing.

**3. INCORPORATE ACTIVITY INTO YOUR ROUTINE.** Scheduling Zoom meetings has become part of our daily lives, so why don't we schedule time for activity, too? Before, during or after work, set aside some time for physical activity. It will not only be better for your physical health—it can improve your cognition and productivity, too.

—Jacob Barkley, PhD, professor of health sciences; Andrew Lepp, PhD, professor of recreation, park, and tourism management, School of Foundations, Leadership and Administration; and Ellen Glickman, PhD, director and professor of health sciences, College of Education, Health and Human Services. See published study at <https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijes/vol13/ISS5/8/>.



## SECURING YOUR DEVICES AT HOME AND WORK

2020 has shifted most of our home, school and business lives online. The devices you use that connect to the internet collect tons of personal data and could threaten your online security if not secured. Information including your home address, email address, phone number, personal ID numbers and date of birth is like gold to a cybercriminal.

Internet of Things (IoT) devices may include your home thermostat, smart refrigerator, smart watch, baby monitor or a smart TV. These devices may be connected to the internet constantly. Protect IoT devices by connecting to a secured network—and be careful not to place them in areas where you have private work or family discussions.

Most home wireless networks (Wi-Fi) are controlled by your internet router or a separate dedicated wireless access

point that broadcasts wireless signals. Those signals can extend way beyond the walls of your house or apartment. If you share your Wi-Fi password with friends or guests, they can connect anytime they pass by—and gain access to your home network.

Here's how to protect your technology and secure your personal/work data:

**• CONFIGURE YOUR PRIVACY AND SECURITY SETTINGS.** Every time you sign up for a new account, download a new app, or get a new “smart” device, immediately configure the privacy and security settings to your comfort level for information sharing and disable features you don't need. Regularly check these settings at least once per year to ensure they are still configured properly.

**• KEEP SOFTWARE UP TO DATE.** Updates include important changes that improve the performance and security of your devices.

**• USE EFFECTIVE PASSWORDS.** In addition to a strong Wi-Fi password, use strong passwords on all your devices and apps. Make them at least 12 characters long, using numbers, symbols and capital and lowercase letters. Make the passwords unique to only that network, device or app. Never share your passwords or store them physically (such as on a sticky-note or in a notebook).

**• SECURE YOUR ACCOUNTS.** Set up multi-factor authentication on any account that allows it and never disable it.

**• SECURE YOUR HOME WIRELESS NETWORK.** Change your router login's default username and password, as they are easily found online. Always keep WPA2 enabled to ensure the best security for the devices on your network. Use a strong Wi-Fi sign-in password. Update your router's firmware regularly to ensure you have the latest security updates.

**• SECURE OLD DEVICES.** If you lend, give, sell or throw out an old device, return it to factory settings to prevent your data from being accessed after you no longer have control. Remember to back up or transfer any important information on the device.

**• AVOID OVERSHARING ON SOCIAL MEDIA.** If you share things like pet names, schools you attended, links to family members and your birthday, you give a scammer all the information they need to guess your password or answer your security questions.

**• DON'T FALL FOR CLICKBAIT SCAMS.** Don't click on links, attachments or anything else in an unsolicited email or text message asking you to update or verify account information. Look up the company's phone number or customer service email address on your own and call or email the company directly to ask if the request is legitimate. ⚡

—Kent State University Division of Information Technology