



Giving Yourself Grace During The COVID-19 Pandemic

by Jean Alstat

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WEST FRANKFORT — As we continue isolating during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are pressures all around for everyone to use their “free time” productively. When we continue hearing about what others are doing with their time, we develop unrealistic expectations for ourselves, which can lead to self-criticism when we don’t meet them.

There is this deceptive idea that because we are spending so much more time at home, we should have extra time to be more productive, and if we don't use it in this way then we are being unwise. In reality, even though we are not working in the office or going out to do things as often, many are still feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the state of the world.

Daily routines were suddenly uprooted, schools were closed, jobs were changed or lost and social gatherings were discontinued. There is real grief that comes from these losses and stress about what to do moving forward, so we must extend grace to ourselves and avoid letting ourselves feel bad if we're not being "productive enough."

Ways to work through productivity guilt

- Don't compare yourself to others. Everyone has their own circumstances and realities, and you must recognize you are doing the best you can in your situation. When you hear of others remodeling their bathrooms, planting new gardens or doing any other extensive activity while staying at home, this is the best time to remind yourself to avoid making comparisons.
- Let yourself rest. Depending on the circumstances, recognize that this may be a time where you need even more relaxation and down time than before. COVID-related stress may have taken a toll on you, and it is important for you to work through those feelings to be mentally healthy.
- Give yourself permission to feel the way you do. Remember that everyone deals with these events in different ways. For some, a distraction such as a project is needed, while others need quiet and comfort. Recognize and accept your need, and don't criticize anyone else for doing what they need to do.
- Educate yourself on grief. People are experiencing genuine grief in these confusing times. Life as we know it was changed in a matter of weeks, and we all have to work through it somehow. Understanding the stages of grief can help you better understand yourself and work through your difficult feelings.

Practicing mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness can help you process your feelings and move past your productivity guilt. Here are a few exercises for practicing mindfulness:

1. One-minute meditation. Get in a comfortable position and set your timer for one minute. Close your eyes and repeat a positive affirmation or imagine a peaceful scene.
2. Mindful eating. Choose your favorite piece of candy or snack and eat it mindfully. Slowly open or unwrap it, listening to the sound it makes. Examine your snack from all sides, engaging each of your senses – touch, sight, sound and smell.

Slowly take a bite, savoring the flavor before swallowing, and then think about why you enjoy it.

3. Massage your arms. Using hand lotion, work your way up from your hands to your elbows with soothing motions.
4. Listen to comforting sounds. Choose whether you want to play your favorite music or simply sit outside and listen to the sounds of nature. Close your eyes and take in all the sounds to enjoy a moment of peace.
5. Doodle or color. Even if you feel like it is childish, doodling and coloring are relaxing, easy activities that can help put you at ease.

If COVID-related stress is affecting your ability to care for yourself or your family, remember to reach out for support. Talk to a qualified mental health professional or your primary care physician. To learn more about help you can receive from Centerstone, call 1-877-HOPE123 (877-467-3123).

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About Centerstone:

[Centerstone](#) is a not-for-profit health system providing mental health and substance use disorder treatments. Services are available nationally through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, the use of telehealth and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also features specialized programs for the military community, therapeutic foster care, children's services and employee assistance programs. Centerstone's Research Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best practices for use in all our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.