

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Thank you for joining us for today's webinar, Life at Home Managing the Stressors, brought to you by Cigna. Please note that copies of the presentation slides and handouts are available for download in the drop down box on the lower left side of the player window. Our presenter today is Dr. Rick Conforto. Dr. Conforto has over 40 years of experience providing direct clinical services to children, adolescents, adults and families. And over 25 years of experience in supervisory and administrative roles. Dr. Conforto holds a doctoral degree in school psychology and a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Science in Experimental Psychology. He's an experienced trainer, providing wellness and educational seminars to a variety of private and business audiences. And now, Dr. Rick Conforto.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([00:53](#)):

Okay, hello, everyone. Thanks so much for those kind words of introduction and welcome, everyone. Thanks for joining us today for this important topic, taking time out of your busy schedule to give yourself some, the gift of some of the information that we'll be presenting today on life at home. Jeez, remember when being at home or spending more time at home was something that you really look forward to, something that could actually be viewed as fun and exciting. Well, the more time we're spending at home now during this pandemic has taken on quite a different meaning than it used to. And along with that, it's become of evident to us some significant challenges and stressors. So we're here to help you out with that today. To help you develop some coping strategies for the stressors that you may encounter in dealing with being at home so much.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([01:49](#)):

And in fact, if we move forward to our seminar goal page. And we've got a little bit more detail here of what we hope to accomplish, and hopefully these goals are consistent with your expectations in joining today. Is understand the stressors of life at home, it is a very unique situation. And we'll talk about what those may be. And then we want to leverage the important aspects of our being, our mind, our body and our spirit toward inoculating us against stress. And we want to talk about some very specific strategies for working at home, living alone, dealing with families at home, being a caregiver, et cetera. And we also want to point out, there might be some times when issues are escalating when you may need to seek some extra help, and we'll share with you some strategies for doing that as well. So again, welcome, and thanks for joining us.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([02:44](#)):

So let's move on and talk about why are things so stressful? Well, we think of this as an equation. And the first variable in the equation are the stressors that were exposed. The tremendous amount of changes that has occurred in our life nearly overnight. It's been like a tidal wave in many ways and we experienced some fear for our health and our safety. There's a lot of economic worries, maybe you've experienced some losses in the ways of normal work and family routines. Perhaps even the loss of loved ones, hopefully not. And there's the psychological stress that goes along with this as well. The uncertainty, the vulnerability, the powerlessness, these things play a big role in the stress equation that we're presented with. But then, the next variable is a multiplier by the unique circumstances of this particular situation that magnifies those stressors. So for example, all of our areas of our lives have been impacted and the change are unrelenting.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([04:01](#)):

It seems like we just don't get a break just when things begin to look a bit better, they begin to slip and slide again. We can't reset, we can't seem to get our feet underneath us before there's more change coming our way. We don't get a break, and that magnifies these existing stressors. And then next on our equation, if you subtract away some of the coping strategies that were part of your repertoire, prior to what is going on today, some of those have been taken away from us. So for example, if you went to the gym and work out and that was how you relieve your stress, well, that's not necessarily the way it used to be anymore for sure. Or maybe you enjoyed a large family get togethers, or getting together with friends, taking a vacation to a warm climate or going skiing in the mountains, or taking a cruise. Some of those things are gone now, and can make it much more difficult for us to cope.

Dr. Rick Conforto (05:05):

So instead, we're stuck at home. And yeah, we may be safer but we're also experiencing some distress that can play out in some common emotional reactions, that we've got depicted on this slide here for you. It really is unsettling for us. And if you look at some of these emotions, some of them may strike home for you. Recognize that these are pretty normal emotional reactions, irritability, sensitivity. I like in the lower right hand corner, Shaggy, because I do recall that at one point I saw a protest on the television of individuals who were protesting against the quarantine. And one gentleman was holding up a sign that said, I need a haircut. And my visual observation of him indicated that he absolutely did need a haircut. So you could see the absolute of things just from inconveniences to significant emotional stressors, but for the most part we feel up ended may impact our motivation.

Dr. Rick Conforto (06:11):

We feel worn out and maybe right now we've just about had enough of this. So I wonder where you're at in terms of those emotional reactions. But we're here to help you out with that. We're here to help rebalance that equation. So this is our plan for today. The first step is we want to help you acknowledge your stress points, except those emotional reactions. But accept them as a call to action, as a prompt that you need to do something to adjust this equation. So let's attack it from two perspectives. First, we want to add we're prioritize, if you will. Strategies that help us build up our resilience, build up our resistance to stress, inoculate us against stress, in other words. And we also want to subtract from that equation, some of the specific stressors that we're experiencing by coming up with some strategies to cope with them. So they no longer impact us to the extent that they do. So that is the game plan for today.

Dr. Rick Conforto (07:25):

And I want to take this opportunity to point out to you that accompanying the presentation are a number of handouts. And the first one I want to mention is life at home self care plan. So this is a workbook that you can use as we go through today's presentation, or as you think about it later, to create your own customized plan for how you're going to rebalance your equation. So the first thing we're going to do is leverage those secret weapons I had mentioned previously. Our mind, our body and our spirit and use those to build our resilience. So it can be like a suit of armor in a sense that inoculates us against the stressors that we're experiencing. So let's move forward and begin that part of our discussion. First, mental stress. We're faced with some challenging times where we're daily making decisions multiple times a day sometimes, constantly trying to adapt to this new world of unknowns. And that can really burn up our mental bandwidth. It's fatiguing constantly having to adapt, we can't necessarily be on autopilot as much as we were previously.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([08:49](#)):

So how can we inoculate ourselves against that stressor using our mental capabilities? Well, first, let's create some structure. Structure is a way that reduces that need to constantly adapt. So we want to establish some routines, and some policies that ease some of that constant decision making for us. So what do I mean by policies? Well, those are a good way to reduce the strain of decision making or even constantly negotiating things around the household and with your family, developing some policies, for example, around when you can and cannot be interrupted at work. Or what is the family policy for visitors? What's the family policy for wearing masks outside the home? And once those policies have been established then there's no more decision making that goes into it, it's a given.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([09:48](#)):

And then meanwhile, we can add some routines. Routines that gives shape to our day, gives some protect from predictability and serve to propel us forward. Simple goalposts, if you will, give me something just like taking a shower each day or breaking for lunch at noon and maybe having lunch with a loved one. Or making sure you get your grocery shopping done on a given day. And even these small routines can bring a sense of accomplishment, that gives you a feeling of some control over your life. Another step we can take further is by investing in something that is purposeful. Feeds our energy supply when we engage in purposeful recreational activities, value driven activities, plan them, recognize the need to do them. For example, maybe family time, or hobbies, or engaging in something creative. Or even maybe a small bite, like sweeping a floor, organizing a closet, cleaning out a drawer.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([10:58](#)):

And then give yourself credit. An attaboy, an attagirl, if you will. For having those things accomplished that you may normally take for granted. So that purposeful, this creates momentum. And then apply your can and can't control filter to things that are stressing you. So for example, if there are things that you can't control, well, we need to work on accepting those. But then focusing our energy on the things that we can control. So for example, we can't control the fact that there's a lot of things going on in our country that translate into some stressful news stories that may be presented to us, but we can control how much of that we take in and how often. What is your information hygiene? What is your immediate diet? If you will. And cut back on unhealthy portions of sources that amp up worries. That create division or anxiety or fear, and add portions to your plate of news that's positive and uplifting.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([12:16](#)):

I'm reminded of an old saying that John Madden used to say all the time is, "Don't worry that the horse is blind, just load the wagon". His way of saying is, don't be sidetracked by the things you can't control, just focus on the things you can. And that gives you a better sense of control in your life. So in doing these things, we can serve our mental energy and don't waste it spinning on things that we can't control. We're constantly trying to adapt all the time. Now if you consult that self care plan, you'll see it contains a calendar and a vast list of a lot of different activities that can help you out in this regard. Okay, good. Now let's move forward from the mind to the body, the physical stress. Now many of you are aware that there's a primitive part of our brain that responds to stress with the fight, flight or freeze reaction, or instinct, or reflex. A surge in stress hormones, like adrenaline and cortisol. And when we experienced stressors like we do now that are unrelenting, then our central nervous system is constantly bathed in those hormones and we get stuck in that stress arousal phase, and it can be exhausting.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([13:43](#)):

It can lead us to be irritable and lack focus, it can melt away our energy and our motivation, it can disrupt our sleep. So what we can do to inoculate ourselves against that problem is to increase our physical activity. Exercise has been shown to reduce those stress hormones in our body while actually training our brain to be more effective in dealing with those challenges. So get moving, even small bursts of exercise or activity have been found to be helpful. So pegging an exercise or other activities that you're more likely to engage in would be things, doing exercise activities with your family. Or maybe exercising if you're doing remote meetings, may be getting up and moving around if they're just telephone conferences. You see incorporating these activities into your everyday routine. And then, of course, the importance of sleep cannot be underestimated. Although one of my patients said to me, "I'll have plenty of time to sleep when I'm dead."

Dr. Rick Conforto ([14:57](#)):

Well, I don't know about that. But I do know that lack of sleep and proper sleep hygiene has been implicated in difficulties with concentration, decreases in creativity, compromising our immune system, increasing our emotional reactivity to stressors by as much as 60%. So, experts tell us we need as adults to get between seven and eight hours of sleep. And it's really a good idea to have a consistent sleep wake time. Regardless of whether you're working, even if it's on the weekend, strive to go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time. And this will make your sleep much more restful and restorative. And how have you been doing with the, "COVID 15". Maybe you've heard of the "Freshman 15" from college, and someone clever actually came up with the "COVID 15" to describe some weight gain that has been going on. Because maybe people are responding to stress by comfort eating or because a lot of our activities are unattainable right now, turning to food and eating because of boredom.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([16:14](#)):

So we want to try to create alternative behaviors to soothe ourselves when we're stressed out, or to engage ourselves and stimulate ourselves when we may be bored. So generate a long list of activities. The self care plan has an abundance of those that you can consult that can help you at these critical times. Eating mindfully, slowing down, trying to schedule your meal times for specific times are all good ideas. And we just want to warn you, of course, about unhealthy coping such as turning to alcohol or tobacco, or other substances, drugs, prescription drugs, even food as a way to numb our feelings can be something that you want to avoid. And in the stress at home resources handout we do have some community links there for you to help you out with that challenge. And then building up your repertoire of relaxation techniques. Mindfully engaging in activities and techniques that fine tune your response reaction instead of your stress reaction.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([17:37](#)):

Fine tune your relaxation response, I mean, to say so right now, for example, let's practice one deep breath. So what I'd like you to do is inhale slowly, in, in, all the way down to the very bottom of your lungs, deeper, deeper. Good now, hold, hold, hold. And now, breathe out. And as you slowly allow all of the air to leave your lungs feel your body relax, feel your shoulders and your neck relax, your muscles relax. That's good. You can see the impact that one simple deep breath has on our feelings of relaxation. And that's because when we take a deep breath and exhale slowly, the vagus nerve in our abdomen sends a signal to our brain that, hey, things are pretty cool here release some feel good hormones. Which our body does, instead of releasing those stress hormones. So assemble a relaxation plan for yourself include things like mindful meditation.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([19:07](#)):

And all of these, as well as other resources are available in this self care plan. And commit yourself to starting with one small thing, even if you're not motivated right now. That's okay. Just start one small wellness activity, and take it from there. And let's move on now to leveraging our spirit to inoculate us against stress. And the goal here is to cultivate your spiritual garden. But you have to do it purposefully, especially in these challenging times. So be very intentional about rebalancing and noticing what helps you with that rebalance. Is activities like listening to music or making music? Is it journaling or writing? Is it a calling a friend or a loved one? For some people it's exercising, working out, running. Other people it's reading, other people it's actually literal gardening. So be sure you cut some timeouts in your regular routine to engage in these soothing types of activities that feed your spirit.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([20:34](#)):

In fact, it's been shown that being in nature about 20 minutes a day, even imagining it or watching videos related to it has been shown to boost mood lifting serotonin levels. So that activity affects us at a neurochemical level. And that is the power of these activities. Another thing that's healthy for your spirit is to maintain those meaningful connections that you had, even prior to the pandemic. So even though we have to physically, distance we don't really have to socially distance. So who are some of the people that you were connected to previously, maybe when you worked from the office, or somebody would have coffee with, maybe invite them to have a virtual coffee break with you. Reach out to them, reach out to friends and family virtually, be more present with the people in your home and connect at a deeper level. And be mindful to avoid people who may be toxic. And by that I mean people who may stoke your feelings of anxiety, fear and dread. Or may stoke your frustration, and stoke division, and maybe take a little break from them for right now and surround yourself a little bit more with people who exude the sense of positivity and comfort.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([22:05](#)):

And we've all heard this suggestion in the past of keeping a gratitude journal. And I would suggest that now. On a daily basis write down two three things each day that you're grateful for. Do that for a month. And on the face of it, it's obvious, you're going to be more appreciative of many of the things that you have in your life. But what's going on between, behind the scenes at a neurological level is that you're actually rewiring your brain based on the concept of neuroplasticity. So by constantly focusing on negativity, you carve a groove in the neural pathways of those negative thoughts and reactions. But by engaging in gratitude journaling, you carve new neural pathways. And in fact, any focus on positivity. We'll talk a bit more about that later. Will carve these new neural pathways and lead to more balance when it comes to how you deal with stress. And any uplifting action of any sort, even small moves. Take that small step begin, better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([23:23](#)):

So that's what we want to encourage you to do is light that one small candle. Okay, now let's focus on some specific stressors that you may be encountering. And talk about some ways to cope with them. So what if you're working from home? Now, many of us have worked from home for a long time now. And for those of you this is no big problem, you were kind of used to it. And so it wasn't a challenge for you. But unlike the rest of us, we've been thrown into this without a little warning. It's kind of been a culture shock. As a psychologist, I never did telehealth before. It's the middle of March, my entire practice has been telehealth. So, yes, it was a culture shock. We've all been thrown into this. And so it's brand new. And we have to really work on establishing first of all, our boundaries. If you're working from home and

there's other people at home, you have to establish some boundaries for them and act as if you're in the office.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([24:33](#)):

And let them know that if they need you to call you or send a text, much like they would if you were at the office. And that you will get to them when you can. Maybe let them know when you hang in the Do Not Disturb sign on the door to your office, that means that you can't be disturbed. Now, it's easier if you have a dedicated room in the house to be your office. But maybe if you can't do that you want to create, if you will, an area with some visual separation by putting up a curtain or a screen or a bookcase. And maybe even some white sound machine to create some noise to muffle sounds. And the next challenge is to be flexible around childcare. Share your situation with your manager if you're really being challenged by this because maybe there are some solutions there and flexible scheduling. For example, perhaps you and your partner can flex your schedules so that you can share your caregiving responsibilities while still both working from home.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([25:42](#)):

Maybe re-upping on day care, finding out more about it. In the resources handout, we have some helpful links for you to explore that in a bit more detail. And you have to guard against the tendency, believe it or not to work too much. It's a myth that people when they work from home work less. No. In fact, pandemic data shows a 40% increase in people being at their computers an extra three hours per day. And half of them are saying they're getting burned out, not surprisingly. So we need to set some limits and boundaries on ourselves too, so we commit to a realistic day of work. And then when we're finished, shut everything off. The office is closed for the day until tomorrow. And also be sure you use your paid time off. Even if you can't travel anywhere, take a day off to maybe take a ride to a park. And walk around or to cozy up with a good book, or to work in your garden. And don't forget taking your breaks. We need breaks.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([26:55](#)):

Breaks actually are restorative to our motivation. They prevent that decision fatigue I was mentioning earlier. And they actually improve our creativity and our productivity. So you may be tempted working from home to ignore them, do not do that. Acknowledge your need to recharge and take those breaks. And to help with visual strain of looking at screens, for example, remember the 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, stare at an object more than 20 feet away for 20 seconds. So hopefully, some of those thoughts are going to help you unblur that work life boundary. And next, let's talk a little bit more about caring for kids from home. On top of everything else, now you have to be a school teacher too. Oh, my, well, that's the situation that we're all in. So make peace with the fact that that is the role that you now have. Recognize that parents of kids under the age of 18 are disproportionately likely to say that their lives have been disrupted by the pandemic. So this really can throw many of us off strike.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([28:16](#)):

So recognize you want to simply try to do your best, you're not going to win teacher of the year and don't strive for the Lindback Award, just try to do your best. And try to engage in creative activities that you are interested in, and that your child may find energizing. Maybe real world life skill, like hey, how about working on a car together with a teenager? Or maybe trying new recipes and sneaking in a ... excuse me, sneaking in a lesson on fractions by measuring out the ingredients for those chocolate chip cookies. Or maybe just going over some star charts, talking about the constellations and then at night

going outside and taking a look at them. And again, your resources handout has a lot of links for Do It Yourself learning ideas. But make peace with the fact that you're in that situation and capitalize on it as best as you can. And one of the things you can do is you can use schedules and routines to try to have a productive day, but build in some downtime.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([29:31](#)):

It's okay don't worry about your child or adolescent being coming forward. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics has found that unstructured self directed play is one of the keys to healthy development, because it teaches kids to engage in self directed play to manage their own time more effectively. To not be dependent on other people to entertain them constantly. And even Einstein talked about the value of simply daydreaming and how it contributed to his creativity. Now teens may especially be challenged because there's such social creatures. They define their identities in many ways by their connection to their peers, or to their peer group interactions. And that can be something that's really challenged here during what is going on right now. So it's best you can try to identify with their input and begin some really meaningful projects that maybe play into some of their interests.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([30:39](#)):

Maybe, if they're gifted with electronics encouraged encourage them to create a podcast. Or if they're athletic, maybe develop a sports practice routine to prepare them for when they're back on the court or the ice or the field. Maybe they can engage in some volunteerism that can be done virtually and they can elicit the participation of some of their friends. I work a lot with teenagers, and I never thought I would hear them say that they're sick and tired of video games. But I actually have been hearing that now. And in fact, they said that one teenager, I thought I would try a technique. I said, well, what is one thing that you've always said to yourself if I just had more time I would do X? And he said, play video games, and I'm sick of video games. So you might be in that situation, you have to be a little bit more creative. I do have one 17-year-old patient who decided he wanted to learn how to play guitar. And he started watching YouTube videos and learned a few things. And his parents decided to pay for instruction, virtually.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([31:52](#)):

And he's really gotten quite good and actually now because our session appointments are via telehealth, he picked up the guitar and played a little bit for me, which is something I wouldn't have been able to experience and appreciate if we weren't doing telehealth. And he's really gotten pretty good. He's playing Beatles songs, 17-year-old kid which I rather enjoy. And then lastly, appreciate the fact that kids are remarkably resilient. They can deal with this. And if you're managing things, well, they will too. And you'll all weather this storm together. In fact, you may actually be closer to each other when all is said and done. So remember, kids are amazingly resilient. And then what is your experience of full house and caregiving for a loved one? This is really a challenge because perhaps many of the supports that you've had in the way of respite care or home health care, whatever it may be, are may be a little harder to get now because of what's going on.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([32:58](#)):

So a good first step is to contain those fears and worries that you're experiencing and try to corral them. Recognize that they're normal. Of course, you're worried and concerned about your loved one. But promise yourself on a daily basis, a time to engage and worry. A daily worry time, maybe a half an hour in the evening whenever you want to do it. And then when a worry pops into your mind during the day,

which can tend to be a huge distractor. Just acknowledge or even write down that worry and say I'll get to that later in my worry time. I don't have to worry about that now. And then later on if you want to, you can review that list. And the ones that you have some control over remember we want to put this through the can and can't control filter, and the worries that you have some control over. Use your worry time to actively engage in problem solving and solution seeking. And then for those beyond your control, simply cross those off the list. Now that may sound impossible or difficult, but it really isn't just take a deep breath and imagine that worry is simply a cloud in the sky or a wisp of smoke that is just going to float on by and disappear.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([34:25](#)):

And if it's a worry that occurs to you often, then just simply objectify it as, yep, that worry, I know that one. I get that one all the time. And allow it to float on by just like you might acknowledge today is Monday or it's sunny outside, with the same degree of objectivity and allow it to float on by. And then if you're experiencing some difficult emotions, again, allow them and then manage them. So if we try to fight against the negative emotions, it only gives them strength, things like frustration or resentment and guilt. It only makes them grow stronger. In fact, it's been said that the difference between pain and suffering is acceptance. Pain can be difficult, but when we accept it, it stays just as pain. But when we don't and we fight it, it can become suffering. So embrace those emotions, acknowledge them as normal, maybe even healthy. And then engage in management activities like venting to a supportive person in your life, or maybe joining an online support group, or maybe getting professional help from a counselor.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([35:51](#)):

So be kind to yourself and don't let that harsh inner critic have last say, and don't forget the importance of flexibility. Avoid rigidly adhering to perfectionistic standards. And rather just acknowledge that sometimes your normal plans and protocols may not be possible in a situation. Allow yourself to be flexible, and move on to plan B and Plan C. Remember to trust try to do the best you can. And don't forget the importance of self care. It's not selfish, it is actually vital. They tell us when we're flying on planes to put your oxygen mask on first. So that then you're able to help other people. So similarly, it's important that you take care of yourself rest, get the exercise so that then you can be there for other people. And in your resources handout we've got a link to a wide range of helpful information for caregivers. And I suggest if you're in that situation that you consult that handout.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([37:06](#)):

And then next, being in the full house has that been taking a toll on your relationships with family members, with spouses, with partners? Not surprisingly, we're seeing some data out of China that their divorce rates have increased post quarantine. So it's important that in the beginning you talk about the need to give each other some space. And it doesn't mean that you love each other less. And the tendency, obviously, when we have a lot of time away, perhaps through business travel or going to work each day. Then when we are back together again, we want to spend that time together doing things and that's wonderful. But when we're together 24/7, then we have to engage in the opposite planning to make sure that we have some space for our own personal needs. So talk about it on non accusatory but objectively that this is something that's helpful for both us let's accept it and plan it.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([38:10](#)):



And how about actively practicing empathy? Think about who your partner is, and what do they need in order for them to be reassured and to be able to function well in the current circumstance? And then try to meet them there. Ask them what they need if you're not sure, and first seek to hear and then seek to be heard. So empathy is looking out for the other person taking care of them, but also expressing the ideas in here for you to be a complete martyr, expressing what your needs are using I statements. But do it in a kind and compassionate way. Not through criticism, but through making a healthy request for what your needs are. And then schedule and build in common connections. Make sure that you take time out to be playful, to laugh, to engage in activities that brings you closer together. Maybe playing board games, watching a TV program together, watching a movie together. That could be something that you want to make sure that you build those calm connections into your daily functioning.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([39:26](#)):

And seek to refill your partner's cup. Not only their benefit, but for yours too. By giving to your partner, you'll also feel better about yourself. So consider some small ways to re spark that giving. Maybe planning a little surprise, leaving a little note somewhere. Just letting your partner know that you love them and you admire them. And maybe in tough times, just giving them the benefit of the doubt and relinquishing the need to always be right about everything, and giving them the benefit of the doubt sometimes. Okay, so we want you to know that if you do have some escalating tensions, take a look at that home together handout. That is one that accompanies the presentation that has some specific suggestions and tips on strengthening these relationships at home. And therefore, know that actually surviving these difficult times in the adversity that we're all faced with in your relationship can make it stronger and make it better. And now let's talk about some individuals who may be, who live at home and are in an empty house. And thus may be experiencing some sense of aloneness, and loneliness.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([40:57](#)):

And that would not be surprising. Even prior to the pandemic Cigna conducted a survey and found that 61% of adults report feeling lonely. So, if you're struggling with this, first of all, you want to be wary of what's going on in your internal dialogue. So take a step back, understand that sense of loneliness can be natural. We're human beings, we're social creatures, we're hardwired to want to be with other people. But this doesn't mean that you're a damaged or defective human being if you're not in a relationship, or you live by yourself. So avoid any of that stinking thinking that can lead you to that conclusion and recognize they feel sad and frustrated, but also to know you don't want to stay stuck there. So let's talk about some ways to move you forward. First, nurture some of the existing relationships that you already have. And it could feel awkward reaching out to people. But think of it as self care, social hygiene, if you will, exercising, eating right, and building connections with other people are all important.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([42:19](#)):

So using technology, can you engage in that virtual coffee break, if you will, or coffee chat with a co worker? Or can you engage in some video conferencing to get together with family members or online games with friends, group get togethers if you will, schedule it. And that way you'll feel connected even though we may be quarantined. And explore some new connections too. So think outside of the box and reach out to other people, online clubs for example, or meetup.com or volunteering. Even those brief distance the interactions are very meaningful to us. Even engaging in some friendly chat with the clerk at the grocery store, or greeting your letter carrier. If you go out to get your letters in your mail as they

walk past. These are all things that give us a little shot of those feel good neurochemicals. And keep in mind that as you engage in new relationships, be authentic and open.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([43:31](#)):

The power of authenticity is very real and resist the temptation to put forth a facade to present yourself as somebody that you think the other person would like who is not really quite like you at all. Now, the risk that you undertake in being authentic is that if somebody doesn't like you, they are really not liking the authentic you. You have to accept that and move forward. But the positive is if they do like you, they are liking the authentic you and you can be easy been more open and more real in your relationship with them. And achieve a much deeper level of friendship and intimacy by being authentic rather than constantly having to present a facade and have the fear that eventually they'll see through it and reject you. So the power of authenticity is very real. And what do we mean by lean into solitude? Well, simply learn to enjoy the pleasure of your own company. It's okay to be alone.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([44:43](#)):

Self company can be a good thing. So engage in the same compassionate self talk that you would direct toward a friend. So if you're experiencing some feelings of loneliness, that's okay. Take a breath and encourage yourself to simply be with those feelings. And remind yourself that this too is going to pass, and that you're okay. And then try some of the things in that home alone handout to get yourself moving in a more positive direction. So let's talk now about some of the silver linings that may be in effect as we come through these difficult times. Seek them out, look for them. And we've got four here that we're showing to you. And this is the power of positivity, if you will. Remember carving those new neural pathways in our brain with positive thinking. So the silver lining in terms of time, we do have more time perhaps. So we can take the time to slow down, to think about the positives that we're experiencing, to imagine better ways that are ahead of us that are times in the future.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([46:10](#)):

Or to simply just be in the present, to just take a moment and absorb the present moment. And then how about family? Have these challenging times created a deeper and richer bond between yourself and loved ones in an authentic way more so than it was being experienced in the past. A lot of times the tapestry of our connections with others can really be enriched by coming through difficult times with them. I did have one patient who said to me, my husband and I were talking the other day about the fact that we actually really like each other. So we've been spending so much time over the past few months together. And then what do you appreciate? Can you begin to look at life through a new lens of appreciation. What have you noticed and really appreciated over the last few months? Has it been the beauty of nature? Have you gotten outside in nature more and walked around in parks because there wasn't much else to do?

Dr. Rick Conforto ([47:33](#)):

And has it given you a little glimpse of the beauty that you never really fully appreciated before? Or do you more appreciate health care workers, or teachers, or essential workers? All of those things are part of that gratitude journal that we had talked about previously. And then what freedoms have you experienced? Maybe a lot of expectations have been stripped away. You haven't had to go to that party, or to that get together, that barbecue of people that maybe you didn't particularly want to hang out with. Maybe some expectations have been stripped away and so we get a glimpse of a simpler life. Where perhaps we're preparing all of our meals. And we're engaging in more activities with family

members and loved ones. And maybe we're creating a larger appreciation in a sense of what really matters to us when we're disconnected from that daily grind. So what have you gained? What have you experienced? What are some of the positive things that are takeaways that you want to continue in your life after the pandemic? Acknowledge those, write those down.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([49:05](#)):

And also, let's talk about resilience. And resilience is something that we all have. We don't always give ourselves that credit. We don't or we may sometimes take it for granted. But we all have resilience baked into our DNA because we all read, we are all descendants of individuals who were resilient. Individuals who overcame adversity, and threat, and danger. And lives to pass their genetic material down. And so we all have this baked into our DNA. So Teddy Roosevelt says, "Do what you can, with what you have, in where you are". Or Arthur Ashe had a similar quote, "Start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can". So when that vein very realistically aiming for your best day. Not that you're going to be perfect. Not that it's going to be the best day you've ever had in your life, but try to aim for your best day right now. And to be okay if you don't achieve that. If that's not okay, shoot for excellence, and do the best you can. And if you fall short of that, well, you'll have added again tomorrow.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([50:22](#)):

I like go with the shoulds. Should this, I should do that, I should have done this, I should have done that. That creates a lot of false and unrealistic expectations to simply focus on getting the most you can out of this experience. And trying to grow and be able to laugh. And have humor associated with some of the things that may short fall short, some of the mistakes that you may make. Be humble, be appreciative and strive to live in the present. This is what we do. We tend to get into the time machine and race into the future and fill ourselves with what if's and worries and what is going to happen? And instead we want to simply be focused on the present moment. Open to all the experiences that are happening right here, right now. Good, bad, boring, fun. If you're at a window right now look outside and maybe appreciate the nature that you can see. If not look around inside or search inside yourself. And focus on any thoughts or experiences that you're having right now in the present moment.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([51:48](#)):

Notice something new each day. Keeping ourselves anchored to the present moment is a very healthy thing for us ... and prevents us from being swept away with anxiety and worries about the future. But we want to keep believing in the future too. But recognizing and giving ourselves hope through the fact that these things are temporary and this too shall pass. And there will be a tomorrow, and believe in that. And then lastly, and perhaps most of all, treat yourself and others with kindness. In many ways, we're all doing the best we can. Can we do better? Sure. Can others do better? Sure. But we're just doing the best we can with what we have right now. So give yourself and other people some compassion, forgiveness, acceptance, being proud of doing the best that you can. Even if you may fall short of some of the perfection in others or you might expect of yourself.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([53:00](#)):

So be honest with yourself about your stressors, use some of the strategies that we talked about today to manage those. But we want you to be aware of the fact that there could be some red flags if you're getting into trouble. So be alert for any sustained worrisome changes in your normal patterns. So for example, if you're depressed or experiencing anxiety that worsens or if you're experiencing some

suicidal thoughts. Be very aware of those in yourself, warn other people and respond to them. In our resources handout, we do have some connections that you can make. There's the 800 number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and some other connections you can make to get some health for yourself or somebody else if you're experiencing that degree of emotional turmoil. That may be characterized as well by withdraw or agitation, just acting in ways that are not characteristic of yourself.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([54:04](#)):

Another red flag would be if there is an escalation of addiction or substance use issues. In late March, one out of four respondents reported binge drinking at least once in the last week, and one out of seven reported illicit drug use. So these challenging times can stoke addictive behavior, be on the lookout for that. And any kind of uncontrolled anger or violence or abuse. This combination of stress and being isolated in locked down can really be volatile and can add to pre existing violence, perhaps that already existed in some household. Some areas report a 20 to 30% increase in calls related to domestic violence since the start of this pandemic. So, these are red flags and know that mental health and support professionals are there for you. We're all engaging in telehealth right now. Some have returned other offices, so you can get the help that you need.

Dr. Rick Conforto ([55:10](#)):

And again, consult that resources handout for some more links and phone numbers to get that support. So in conclusion, I want to say, recognize your resilience and know that you've got this. You can manage these stressors, and you could come out the other end of this even better than you are now. So take the heart, some of the recommendations that I made and implement at least one of those, perhaps more. Take the time to review the valuable handouts that accompany this presentation. And take advantage of those that may be helpful to you. And using these strategies, you're going to be able to tame those stressors. And give yourself as I mentioned before, permission to do the best you can. That's a strategy in and of itself that will strengthen your resilience, help you be able to appreciate the silver linings and bring you through these troubled times with more success. So again, thanks so much for joining me today. I hope this discussion is helpful to you and please take good care of yourself. At this point, I'll turn over things to our moderator for closing comments.

Speaker 1 ([56:30](#)):

Thank you, Dr. Conforto. And I want to thank you all very much for being with us for today's presentation. That concludes today's webinar.