

how do you deal with FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

BY HUNTER SULLIVAN '20 PHOTO BY SOPHIA MARCINEK '20

DURING A MODERN PANDEMIC

Quarantine is a very hard time for all of us. We're away from our friends, away from the things we love to do, and away from the familiarity. Even in isolation, it is important to take care of ourselves and each other. We asked our counselors how to handle some of our feelings and concerns during this uncertain time.

IS IT NORMAL FOR ME TO FEEL ANGRY?

BUXTON BD: Yes. There are a whole range of feelings and emotions that go along with the stay at home order and online learning, and actually some anger can be a part of a healthy range of emotions. Anger may be a result of frustration, unfairness, isolation, or a lack of control over the situation. Anger itself is neither good nor bad, but rather it is how you handle that anger that is the key. It is when anger leads to out of control behavior, or where there is a risk of harm to self or others, that intervention may be necessary. When anger leads to unhealthy behavior, situations, or relationships, it is important to reach out to our support network and resources for help.

SOMETIMES I JUST DON'T WANT TO GET OUT OF BED, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

BUXTON BD: We have to acknowledge that what is happening right now in our world is not normal. The extended stay at home orders and not being able to interact with others as we would typically can lead us to feel lonely, hopeless, or fearful. When that happens, we tend to lose our sense of purpose and perhaps don't see the point of getting out of bed. **BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THIS SITUATION IS TEMPORARY, WILL EVENTUALLY PASS, AND THINGS WILL GET BACK TO NORMAL.** The steps our society has been forced to implement in order to control the spread of a virus has created a set of fears that have a rational basis: economic fear, fear of catching the virus and getting sick, fear of losing a loved one, fear of dying, fear of being alone, etc. Sometimes when we allow these fears to grow and take control of our thinking, it can be overwhelming and we don't have the motivation or energy to face the day. Often resuming activities

you enjoy, talking to friends or loved ones, or doing something to distract yourself can alleviate these anxieties. If anxieties become chronic, last for a long time, and begin to affect daily life, it is time to reach out to your counselor for help.

All of us have a day every now and then where we don't feel like facing the world, or we just want to stay in bed. It is important to distinguish between normal ups and downs that everyone has from time to time, and recurring or frequent days where you feel like staying in bed. Many of us feel down when things are not going well, but we rebound and recover quickly once things get better. However, if these feelings last longer than usual and a return to normal routines and activities doesn't help, you may be suffering from depression. When determining whether you are depressed, you would consider things such as sleep patterns, appetite, feelings of being down or sad for an extended period, loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy, etc. **IF YOU SUSPECT YOU MAY BE DEPRESSED,** the best thing to do is to tell a parent and get screened by a medical professional or licensed mental health counselor. The counselors at RJHS certainly have a lot of experience working with students that may be depressed, and we can also direct students and families toward resources in the community.

IS IT OK THAT I FEEL SAD EVEN THOUGH MY FAMILY AND I ARE HEALTHY AND OTHER PEOPLE ARE SICK?

BUXTON BD: Yes, absolutely. In fact, feeling sad when bad things happen to other people is a sign of caring and compassion. Our common humanity and the fact that all of us experience suffering in our lives points us toward a greater goal of taking steps to help alleviate suffering in our world. We may see the news,

and realize that even though we feel fine, there are other people that are sick and dying. We can take moments in our day to pause and remember these people in our prayers. Also, many of us are motivated to take action and do some charitable works to help others (when safe to do so), or donate time or money to organizations that are on the front lines every day, or just be grateful for our health and not take anything for granted. **IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAPPEN AROUND US THAT ARE BEYOND OUR CONTROL, AND THAT EVEN THOUGH WE FEEL SAD, WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN GOD TO LEAD US TOWARD HOPE AND RENEWAL.**

I'M HAVING A HARD TIME SLEEPING, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

BUXTON BD: There could be any number of reasons you are having a hard time sleeping, but recently the events in our world have raised anxiety levels for many and can cause sleep disturbance. Often it is not helpful to try to force yourself to sleep. Tossing and turning only increases anxiety. It may be helpful to get up and do something relaxing such as reading a book, taking a bath, or drinking some herbal tea. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed. Going on your cell phone or ipad, watching TV, playing video games, or listening to music sometimes activate your thoughts and attention center of your brain and can actually make it harder to sleep.

ALL I WANT TO DO IS EAT, WHAT CAN I DO INSTEAD?

BUXTON BD: Because we are home all the time, and it is easy to walk to the kitchen and eat, we are often turning to food when we are simply bored. It is comforting, and it makes us feel better for a short time. But if we eat too much, it can make us feel worse about ourselves. Whenever we feel the urge to eat, we can substitute another activity we enjoy that will take our mind off eating. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE WE STAY ACTIVE AND MOVE DURING THIS TIME AT HOME.** Getting exercise like regular walking, running, biking, yoga, or weight training can help our mind and body, and boost our mood and energy level. If you must eat, have some healthy snacks around that will satisfy your cravings until the next meal.

I'M EMBARRASSED THAT I HAD COVID-19, OR SOMEONE IN MY FAMILY DID, SHOULD I BE?

BUXTON BD: Not at all. Some of us have had, or might have, Covid-19 at some point. Just like we can't control when we get sick with the cold or the flu, Covid-19 doesn't discriminate in the people it infects. It is a new virus to everyone, and we don't yet have the ability to fight it naturally.

I FEEL LONELY, HOW DO I HELP THIS?

MS. SIADE: So many of us are feeling lonely and disconnected right now. It is not as easy to connect with others right now as it was before we had to "stay at home." We are social beings, and when we can't socialize, it can make us feel lonely. Reaching out to others through Zoom, Facetime, Teams can help us feel more connected and less lonely. Try playing games virtually with friends or family members; call a friend or family member; send messages to others. Make a concerted effort to stay connected with others! **REACH OUT! OFTENTIMES, WE RELY ON OTHERS TO REACH OUT TO US AND WHEN THEY DON'T WE BECOME FRUSTRATED, UPSET, LONELY, SAD OR IRRITABLE.** Don't feel that just because no one is reaching out to you that you are not loved, missed or cared for. Most of the time, others are also waiting for someone to reach out to them as well. It can also be helpful to remind yourself of those you do have in your life, even though you may not be able to see them or be with them. Shifting our focus from our loneliness to "who loves us and cares for us?" and "What I can do to be closer to others right

"RIGHT NOW WE ARE GRIEVING THE LOSS OF OUR WAY OF LIFE AS WE'VE ALWAYS KNOWN IT; WE ARE GRIEVING THE LOSS OF OUR PHYSICAL PROXIMITY AND CONNECTEDNESS TO OUR FRIENDS, FAMILY, PEERS AND COLLEAGUES."

Ms. Slade MA, LPC School Therapist

now?" can help elevate our mood and help us feel better. We can also help ourselves by asking, "What can I do that will make me feel better?" and then do it! **ALSO, REMEMBER YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS; EVERYONE ELSE IS AT HOME TOO!**

I AM SO OVERWHELMED WITH SCHOOL WORK AND DON'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE IT. HOW CAN I MANAGE MY TIME BETTER?

MS. SIADE: First, give yourself grace and accept that this is new and overwhelming for a lot of us; there are going to be some days that we are all more productive than others. Routines are extremely helpful; they help us be productive, provide us with structure and help to alleviate stress and anxiety. Try to develop a routine that works for you!

SOMETIMES I LASH OUT AT MY FAMILY WHEN I DON'T MEAN TO, HOW DO I PREVENT DOING THAT?

BUXTON BD: Living with others is a challenge, and now that we and our

family members are at home all the time, it is not surprising that we get on each other's nerves. Communication is the key. Being open and honest with family members, but also taking the time to LISTEN is important. Perhaps retreating to your room can be helpful when you feel like the tension is high, then come back later when things have calmed down. But again, eventually it is good to talk about frustrations in a respectful and mature manner. Remember that this situation is not normal for parents either, so mutual understanding goes a long way. If you do lash out, apologize and explain why you are feeling stressed. It may be good to offer to help around the house, or agree to spend some time with the rest of the family together.

I FEEL LIKE I'M MISSING OUT ON SUCH BIG LIFE EVENTS. HOW DO I COPE WITH THAT?

BUXTON BD: It is okay to feel this way, and to grieve missing events. It may help to realize that everyone else is missing them too. Discussing it with friends and family could help take some of the sting out of it. Staying connected to friends that are going through the same thing is so important. It is good to keep in mind that life is such a gift, and that there will be big events and special moments in the future. For seniors, this is indeed a tough time, missing out on some rite of passage events and times. But there is also a lot to be grateful for, and a promising future still ahead. It may be helpful to realize too that we tend to build up some events in our mind to be greater than they actually are, and while we regret not experiencing those, over time those regrets will become less.

HOW CAN STUDENTS GET IN TOUCH WITH A COUNSELOR IF THEY NEED HELP?

BUXTON BD: There are a few primary ways students can get in touch with counselors. The most common ways right now are email and online virtual meetings on Microsoft Teams. A lot of things can be handled through email, particularly assisting students with academic concerns or questions. Students can also email to request an online virtual meeting on Teams with any academic, personal, or mental health issues, for those times when an email is not sufficient. The counselors have already done hundreds of online meetings through Teams.

IF YOU HAVE THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE OR HURTING YOURSELF, SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY. REACH OUT TO AN ADULT YOU TRUST, A PARENT, YOUR COUNSELOR, AND BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON. YOU CAN GET HELP, AND THERE IS TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION THAT WORKS. OTHER RESOURCES INCLUDE SAFE2TELL, THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE AT 1-800-273-8255, OR CALL 911.

NEED HELP?

YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR IS HERE TO HELP AND OFFER NO JUDGMENT.

REACH OUT

