



317 Days

By Emma Fogel, MSW, RSW

It's been 317 days and I can't help but pause and shake my head in disbelief. Those of us who live and breathe the wonderful world camp typically associate countdowns with excitement; the number of days until we can return to our summer homes to enjoy everything from dancing with our friends at socials, to going on a canoe trip and competing in a colour war basketball game. Countdowns are usually full of the hope for what's to come.

The countdown of the last 317 days has felt increasingly complex and, at times, hopeless. Of course, there have been moments where we can find glimmers of joy, gratitude and spurts of creativity. But with each passing day, the countdown of what now has been 317 days spent mostly in isolation, has resulted in collective sadness, grief, loneliness and increasing feelings and fear. We acknowledge some days are better than others, similar to taking a sailboat out by yourself on a day with minimal wind; the experience is unexciting, quiet, monotonous. However, the quiet days have become fewer, noticing that our sailboat rides feel more turbulent, as if we are stuck in a rapid windstorm alone, desperately trying to correct our capsizing boat.

We are frustrated, depleted and overwhelmed.

On January 28th, #BellLet'sTalkDay, an initiative that's all about generating awareness, psychoeducation and conversation around mental health, I encourage you all to check in with yourselves, your loved ones and those who are part of your camp communities. The past 317 days have pushed our physical, cognitive and mental health to limits we had never thought possible. Over the past year we have all gotten quite familiar with our unwanted cabinmates named anxiety, anger, fatigue and depression. These cabinmates have occupied our brains, and on day 317, it feels like they have overstayed their welcome.

Every day in my (virtual) office, I have folks disclosing their reality; they feel worse every day. I'm frequently asked the question "when will this end?!" signifying a loss of hope for the future. I admit that as a pediatric social worker amidst a pandemic, my concern for the younger generation's mental health has become increasingly worrisome. At times I find myself wishing I was a magician with the enchanted solution to minimize our collective pain and suffering. Alas, I am not. But now, 317 days later, I do have some simple, tangible tips and tricks to help us support one another and our mental health throughout this ongoing crisis.

The "FACE COVID" acronym is a great reminder of practical strategies we can use to respond to our emotions effectively (Harris, 2020).

F = Focus on what's in your control

- Aside from social distancing, the future of the COVID-19 pandemic is largely out of our individual control. So why not focus your mind on things we can control like self-care, exercising, maintaining routine, ability to reach out to loved ones.

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

- Take the time to think about how you are feeling and writing them down in a journal (or in your phone or a post-it note).

- Helpful nighttime practice: Encourage your child to keep a gratitude journal to promote positivity and self-confidence. Have them reflect on:
 1. Something they were grateful for that day
 2. Something they were proud of for that day
 3. Something that they will let go of tomorrow

C = Come back into your body

- Exercise, meditation, and mindfulness can be useful for us to increase both physical and psychological well-being.
- Anything counts – be compassionate with yourself if you only have the energy to walk around the block or do a plank for 30 seconds!

E = Engage in what you're doing

- Sticking to a schedule with time set aside for work duties can help you be more present with your family during activities.
- Have the same designated screen time for both parents and children by creating a family media plan.
- Try to encourage daily independent “rest hour” without tech to allow for regulation and relaxation time for the whole family.

C = Committed action

- After reflecting on what needs your family may have, commit to what you will work to improve and set goals as a family.
- I.e. Many young people have become nocturnal throughout the pandemic – encouraging earlier bedtimes for the family as a whole so parents are modelling behaviours for children and adolescents.

O = Opening up

- Connect with family and friends who are also home with their families staying warm and safe either via phone or video chat.
- Share the feelings that you are having because chances are, you are not alone in feeling stressed or anxious during this time.

V = Values

- Let your family's core values guide the activities you choose and the ways you communicate your feelings with one another.
- I.e. Treat everyone with respect: When a family conflict arises, give everyone a chance to share their opinion and come to a conclusion that is most fair for everyone. A helpful analogy can be to view the family unit (those living in the home together) as a sports team; the success of the team as a whole depends on communication, cooperation, and mutual respect. Parents can serve as the referees to facilitate fair gameplay!

I = Identify resources

Resources can come in many different shapes and forms including family, friends, healthcare professionals, psychological services, internet websites, podcasts, and books. Find out where you can get support and advice when you need it. Here are some helpful resources:

Books:

- [You're Ruining My Life](#): How to Survive the Teenage Years with Connected Parenting by Jennifer Kolari



- [Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls](#) by Lisa Damour Ph.D.
- [The Whole-Brain Child](#) by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson
- [Drop the Worry Ball](#) by Alex Russell and Tim Falconer
- [The Tech Solution: Creating Healthy Habits for Kids Growing up in a Digital World](#) by Dr. Shimi

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Podcasts:

- Ask Lisa: The Psychology of Parenting with Lisa Damour
- Raising Good Humans with Dr. Aliza Pressman
- Connected Parenting with Jennifer Kolari
- Mindfulness Meditation Podcast
- Unlocking Us with Brene Brown

D = Disinfect and distance

- Lastly, as we are hearing, again and again, it is important to wash hands regularly, wear masks when out in public, and maintain social distancing to the best of our abilities.

I acknowledge and appreciate that many of us feel defeated and de-motivated, to the point where a FACE COVID acronym and accompanying strategies may feel or seem un-doable and frankly, unappealing. To those folks, please know that it is my only intention to increase your energy levels from 3% to 5%, to shift your mood from hopeless to a mood that realizes a teeny sparkle of brightness for the future. To provide momentary relief from navigating the sailboat in a windstorm and know that you are not doing this alone. The storm is almost over and we will get through this together.

To learn more about Emma's practice and how she can support your camp please visit www.emmafogeltherapy.com.