

3 Ways to Jump-Start Your Creativity During Coronavirus

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It's no exaggeration to say that COVID-19 has changed our lives in dramatic, unexpected, and unwanted ways. People living with or vulnerable to a mental illness have been especially impacted, and now more than ever it's important to have effective coping mechanisms to protect yourself during these unprecedented times.

For centuries, people have turned to the arts and creative expression to manage or reduce symptoms of mental illness, and science is finally catching up to what we have always intuitively known — creating helps us feel better. Research suggests that artistic activities can help people manage anxiety and depression, express things too difficult to put into words (e.g., coping with a cancer diagnosis), process traumatic experiences, develop a more positive sense of self, and even improve immune system functioning (Cohut, 2018).

While completing a project brings with it a sigh of relief and sense of accomplishment, the *process* of creating appears to be equally important and offers numerous benefits independent of a person's skills or talents (Harvard Health Publishing, 2017).

Unfortunately, it's not always easy to create when you're living in a pandemic.

If you're finding it difficult to be creative during COVID-19, please know that you're not alone. It can feel impossible to connect with our imagination when our mind is consumed with ever-changing shelter-in-place orders, working from home, homeschooling children, worrying about our health, and attempting to make plans for a future that is uncertain, at best. If you're feeling stuck or like you're having trouble engaging in activities that usually bring you joy, consider trying the following ideas to jumpstart your creativity and revitalize your muse.

1. **Stop Pressuring Yourself.** This is so much easier said than done, but it's also a critical mindset to work on mastering. Just like a watched pot will never boil, you can't force creativity. Berating yourself as you stare at your piano, telling yourself you *ought* to be making something as you watch clay spin on your potter's wheel, or calling yourself a failure because words aren't flowing from your fingers to fill a blank document will not get your creative juices flowing. Check in with yourself, accept wherever you are, and let that be your starting point. Life is all about cycles — the tide flows in and out, day gives way to night and night alternates with day, the seasons turn hot, and then cold — so why should we be any different? Today may not be the day you create a masterpiece, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy doing something artistic. Be kind to yourself; you're doing the best you can.
2. **Go outside.** We may not be able to travel like we did before the pandemic, but we can still explore closer to home. Take a walk, lay on a blanket in your yard, or sit on your patio or balcony with your beverage of choice. Don't think about your art; instead, focus on the world around you. Watch the way the leaves sway in the wind. Listen to the birds chirping and cawing. Study the slow progression of an inchworm on your fence or watch a squirrel enjoy a nut in a tree. Inspiration is famous for striking when we least expect it and surrounding yourself with nature can help you relax enough to hear the elusive whisper of creativity when it finally stirs.

- 3. Try a different medium.** Changing it up can do wonders for your creativity. If writing is your passion, trying painting with watercolors or using finger paints or even coloring in a coloring book. If you typically paint, try writing a poem or short story about something you saw outside. If you usually create pottery, try turning on music and dancing around your room, moving in whatever way feels right. Try one or several things that are not your usual form of artistic expression, and give yourself permission to explore and play. Trying something new can jolt your brain out of a rut, allowing it to depend less on unconscious habits or usual ways of acting, and forcing it to be more aware and pay closer attention, which can result in unexpected creative insights.

Although it can be difficult to feel creative in times of chaos, expressing yourself through artistic endeavors is an important method of coping with what's happening around you, as well as within you. Whether you favor writing, drawing, painting, dancing, singing, ceramic-making, stained glass work or something else, now is not the time to stop expressing yourself. Creative expression offers a sense of normalcy, a respite from the outside world, and a chance to explore your thoughts and feelings while also reducing stress. As you continue to find your footing in this unfamiliar world, remember that self-care is not optional, but essential. Have fun creating!

References

Cohut, M. (2018, February 16). *What are the health benefits of being creative?* Medical New Today. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/320947>

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